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# Caribbean Journeys

Intersections of Female Identity in the Novels of Michelle Cliff

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## Acknowledgements

One thing that I remember from my childhood is my love of stories. I began to invent all kinds of stories myself, before I even could read or write. Another point is that I almost always found the protagonists in the children's books extremely boring, and I used to imagine that they had hidden evil sides, ulterior motives, or secret characteristics. I also wanted to know more about the rather flat secondary characters. I tended to ask questions like, 'What happened to them after that?', 'Where did they come from?', 'What are their families like?', and I never received satisfactory answers to my ponderings. Today, more than thirty years later, my love for stories has grown into an academic interest in the study of narratives and literary theory. Indeed, I feel lucky almost every day that I have had the opportunity to turn my love of books into a profession, and that I get to teach my favorite short stories to students who share the same love of narrative with me. My path to being a literary scholar, however, has been long, and at times, also rough. Now, it is time to stand back and thank all of you people without whose help, intelligence, inspiration, advice and friendship, I would never have achieved my dream of completing my doctoral dissertation.

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This book is dedicated to Lasse Kekki and his Queer visions.

Turku, March 2012

Kaisa Ilmonen



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## 1. Introduction

The Caribbean is much more than a geographical place. To speak about the Caribbean as unified archipelago is deeply misleading. The islands are sites of numerous intersecting cultures, languages and ethnicities, these include: native Caribbeans, Africans, French, Dutch, English, Jews, and people from the Indian subcontinent. 'Caribbean culture' is a whirlwind of diversity; syncretic traditions and religions, creolized languages, and most importantly, ethnically heterogeneous peoples. Geographically the Caribbean refers to over 7000 islands located in the Caribbean basin, and the surrounding coasts. Culturally, however, it reaches much further. For example Paul Gilroy has used the metaphor "the black Atlantic" to emphasize the history of complicated colonial entanglements centered on the Caribbean in his study *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993/1996). Sometimes the Canadian city of Toronto is called one of the largest Caribbean metropolises, and David Dabydeen has called today's Britain the largest of the Caribbean islands as a result of extensive immigration since the 1950s (see Kutzinski 2001, 10). The Caribbean emerges as an outcome of diasporic movements, cultural syncretisms, colonization, acculturations, and trade routes. For some, the Caribbean is a consumerist fantasy created by tourist guides, for some it bears the trauma of human trafficking, but for millions it is a dearly beloved home, or a place of origin. It is an area constituted out of multiple journeys: the Caribbean consists of 'islands in between', at the same time, it is both transnational and local, what one might term a *translocal site*.

Caribbean migrant writing has been published world wide since the 1930s. Jean Rhys' *Voyage to the Dark* (1936) was one of the first novels to describe the experiences of Caribbean expatriates in Europe. The novel was followed by corner-stones such as Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* (1956) and George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960). From the 1980s, a strong front of female migrant authors of the Caribbean origins started reflecting on the multi-layered cultural identities in their works. Many of these authors challenged the notions of 'roots', 'origins', 'ethnic backgrounds', 'traditions', and the limits of language in exploring their identities in order to find ways to define their Caribbeanness. As migrants in London, Paris, New York or Toronto, many authors have tried to reclaim a home and identity in the midst of foreign culture.

In the 1980s, a generation of authors defining themselves in terms of their Caribbean origins began to create new ways to represent Caribbeanness and to reflect its multifaceted, creolized, nature. At the same time the themes of hybridity, imaginary homelands and in-betweenness appeared as crucial constituents of the general corpus of postcolonial literatures.

The USA-based Jamaican author Michelle Cliff belongs to the aforementioned 80s generation of Caribbean migrant writers. She has explored the Caribbean migrant experience in her novels, collections of short stories, and prose poems. Her Caribbean seems to be a translocality constructed out of numerous movements and migrations, a site of diasporic journeys. Her representations sustain the larger imagery of the Caribbean, which has been metaphorized as “the Repeating Islands” by Antonio Benitez-Rojo, a place with no stable origin (Benitez-Rojo 1996). The absence of origins is a conspicuous feature of the Caribbean cultural space. As Carole Boyce Davies remarks, the Caribbean is not so much a geographical location as “a site of dissemination of a variety of socio-cultural processes”, as well as a space of “continuous change and the ongoing questioning of self, origin, direction” (Davies 1994, 13). Thus, literature has provided a forum for cultural self-definitions for many writers of Caribbean origins.

Cliff uses the local Caribbean traditions and folkloric mythologies in her novels to re-write the colonial representations of the Caribbean cultural identity. In the preface to her collection of essays and prose poems, *Land of Look Behind* (1985), Cliff writes about re-claiming the effaced African past as a basis for her sense of home and identity:

To write as a complete Caribbean woman, or man for that matter, demands us retracing the African past of ourselves, reclaiming as our own, and as our subject, a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the cane fields, or gone to bush, or trapped in a class system notable for its rigidity and absolute dependence on color stratification. Or a past bleached from our minds. It means finding the artforms of these of our ancestors and speaking in the *patois* forbidden us. It means realizing our knowledge will always be wanting. It means also, I think, mixing in the forms taught us by the oppressor, undermining his language and co-opting his style, and turning it to our purpose. (LLB, 14.)

Here Cliff sets out her methods for recognizing “a complete Caribbean female-self”<sup>1</sup> as an agent of resistance, of creating and imagining. She emphasizes the role of retracing one’s own past, personal memories, ancestors, language and modes of representing: the forms of *textual rebellion*. This rebellion over representation is also the starting point of my study of Michelle Cliff’s novels *Abeng* (1984), its sequel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and *Free Enterprise* (1993). Thus, I will focus on the processes of re-writing Caribbean history and female identity in the novels. My aim is to map the modes of Cliff’s textual rebellion in order to survey her literary journeys towards the decolonization of the Caribbean home and feminist identity.

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<sup>1</sup> However “a complete Caribbean self” seems to be an oxymoron in Cliff’s writing since, as I will demonstrate later, it is strongly connected to constructing processual and hybrid subjectivities never to be completed. Here, the claim towards a complexity of self is connected to the terminology of the early eighties identity politics.

In this study, my aim is to examine how Cliff's textual rebellion is presented as a site of feminist identity construction within the fluid Caribbean cultural space. I will consider how Cliff's marginalized heroines as non-white, often non-heterosexual, and as colonized women constitute their textual cultural spaces in order to gain agency. I will explore how the intersecting structures of subordination, alongside inherited colonial legacies, are re-thought in Cliff's novels in order for a Caribbean female subject to feel *at home*. My hypothesis is that the Caribbean cultural space is much more than a location or a place in her novels. It can also be a journey towards resistance, remembering, and identity. The journey cannot be made without a deep sense of history. I agree with Antonia MacDonald-Smythe, who has pointed out, that within the Caribbean cultural reality 'home' is always itself in a process of construction, the site of multiple simultaneous dialogues (MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 1). Besides the culturally situated identity processes, my aim is to explore the complicated relationship between the colonial modernity and Caribbean postcolonial fiction in this study. I will analyze the ways Cliff's novels challenge Western modes of representation while deconstructing the founding *mythos* of modernity. I will consider how her novels undermine and dismantle Eurocentric ways of conceptualizing history, and moreover, how they 're-claim' the Caribbean past. In broader philosophical frames of reference, this leads to a consideration of the narrative nature of understanding modernity, and how the postcolonial novel can question the colonial "master narratives", for example, in regard to Western Enlightenment or racial politics. I want to ask: How does Cliff's fiction subvert the regulatory paradigms of Western versions of the era of Caribbean colonization? And, what kind of "liberatory poetics" is needed to confront these versions? I will argue that Cliff's fiction is an attempt to suggest such poetics, textual rebellion, for diasporic Caribbean women of color. Indeed, the aspects of gender and sexuality are crucial for her liberatory poetics. Indeed, my aim is to explore, what kinds of feminist and queer counter-discourses are envisioned in Cliff's novels in order to render the multiple intersecting forms of subordination visible.

There is a moderate amount of published research on Cliff's literary work. Most of the scholarly work, including PhD dissertations, has been conducted in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Most of the scholarly works focus on the representations and the constructions of Caribbean cultural identities. To the best of my knowledge, only two monographs focus exclusively on Cliff's fiction. One of them is *Piecing the Tapestry of Memory and History* by Noraida Agosto (1999). However, her substantial study focuses solely on the uses of memory as a means of re-writing history in Cliff's fiction. This is one of the few studies to consider *Free Enterprise* alongside the so-called Clare Savage novels, *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*. The other monograph is a primarily narratological discussion of Cliff's first two novels. In most scholarly studies, Cliff's novels are compared to other novels, either written by African-Caribbean, African-American, or by white

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2 By August 2011 there were 10 Dissertation Abstracts filed in the Modern Language Association database with "Michelle Cliff" as "primary subject author". For the sake of comparison, at the same time there were 30 dissertation abstracts with Alice Walker, and 180 with Toni Morrison as primary subject author. However, only 11 dissertations had Jamaica Kincaid as a primary subject author, which tells us that Cliff and Kincaid are equally established in the American discussion though Kincaid might be better known in Scandinavia due to translations.

Caribbean authors, depending on the focus. For the first group Jamaica Kincaid, Paule Marshall, and Audre Lorde, for the second Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, and for the third Jean Rhys's novels, to name a few, have been the subjects of these comparative studies. Of these *Making Home in the West/Indies: Constructions of Subjectivity in the Writings of Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid*, published in 2001 by Antonia MacDonald-Smythe, has provided valuable information about diasporic Caribbean identities for this study. The comparative studies have focused on topics such as Caribbean home, diaspora, cultural identity, and feminist issues.

One of the most obvious themes in Cliff's fiction, namely homosexuality, has not yet been studied widely. Cliff's sexually subversive representations have often received a short shrift within Caribbean studies,<sup>3</sup> while they also remain largely unknown among recent queer scholars. Although the topics of Cliff's novels precede many contemporary discussions, such as those concerning "intersectional queer studies" or "queer of color –critique", they are not widely analyzed – unlike other lesbian feminist works of the 80s which have been "rediscovered" by many recent queer scholars.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, one the objectives of this study is to reflect on the intersections of the multiple simultaneous axes of identity, specifically those of "race", ethnicity, class, gender, and location, but also sexual orientation, and to examine how all these axes are present in Caribbean journeys depicted by Cliff. The inclusion of the more queered perspectives becomes my contribution to the existing Cliff-research: my hypothesis is that neither postcolonial, nor feminist, or queer methodologies alone are sufficient in the context of Cliff's writing. More intersectional points of views are necessary. In most cases, the scholarly material published on Michelle Cliff's writings concentrates on either *Abeng*, *No Telephone to Heaven*, or both of them together. My study aims at an extensive investigation of all three of her novels. In addition to my focus on intersectional constitutions of cultural identity, I want to argue that *Free Enterprise* can be read in a continuum with the Clare Savage novels constituting an evolving line regarding the construction of identity.<sup>5</sup> One of my contributions to the field of Cliff-research, therefore, is this recognition of *Free Enterprise*, which has not received sufficient critical attention.

Moreover, I want to emphasize that one of the ethical aims of this study is also to apply research concentrated on the Caribbean area by the Caribbean scholars. I will try to open a dialogue between "Western" postcolonial theorizing and indigenous Caribbean perspectives. This mutually supplementing dialogue becomes fruitful in several ways: while the Caribbean

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3 None of the ten dissertation abstracts recorded in the MLA-database (Aug 2011) in which Michelle Cliff is identified as "primary subject author" had any subject terms referring to homosexuality, even though several critics have discussed the topic in her writing (see e.g. Chin 1997; Elia 2000; Gourdine 2002; Ilmonen 2004, 2005, and 2008; O'Callaghan 1998; Raiskin 1994b; Walker 2001).

4 I am referring to writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa.

5 There are hints in the novels supporting my reading of Clare Savage's character and the protagonist of *Free Enterprise*, Annie Christmas, in a continuum. First of all, they have both emigrated from the Caribbean, but ultimately consider their island as a home. Second, they are both depicted with similar adjectives having light skin and green eyes, but most importantly, they both have an ancestor who possessed "a snuffbox carved from the Rock of Gibraltar" (A, 29; FE, 200, 202). I suggest that the same ancestor and the same features posit them as parallel characters.

research provides critical local points of view, the Anglo-American research is helpful when examining topics such as homosexuality, which is largely neglected within the Caribbean, but has been theorized extensively elsewhere. Finally, I would like to add that as much as this is a study about the Caribbean journeys depicted in Cliff's novels, it inevitably reflects my Caribbean journeys too. The research process has not always been easy, and many times I've been acutely aware of my reading position as a white, Nordic scholar. I hope that my cultural and geographical distance could also benefit my reading and help me to see some of the discussed themes differently.

Chapter One presents my methodological choices and the theoretical backgrounds of the study. I will clarify my use of concepts such as postcolonial, power, discourse, intersectionality, Creole, queer and identity, connecting them with poststructural/postcolonial frames of reference. Chapter Two focuses more closely on the novels of Michelle Cliff. I will introduce the basic themes of each novel highlighting their relation and contribution to Cliff's rebellion over representation. In order to examine Cliff's rebellious textuality, I need to focus on the ways her writing uses the textual doubling revealing the Caribbean "flip-sides" of the coin named "modernization". Thus Chapter Three discusses the colonial discourses embedded in the Western understanding of "Modernity". I will consider colonial knowledge as "white mythology", following Jacques Derrida's definition of the term. My further analysis focuses on Cliff's narrative confrontations with these white mythologies, the ways in which she deconstructs the colonialist versions. In this chapter, I will also consider the dubious contributions made by Western Empiricism to categorizations of "race" and sexuality.

Chapters Four and Five move towards Caribbean counter-discourses created in the novels in order to examine what kinds of decolonizing discourses Cliff foregrounds in constituting textual rebellion and liberatory representations for the Caribbean woman. Chapter Four focuses on the myths, Caribbean mythology, as well as on rites and ritual healings described in Cliff's novels. I will argue that the Caribbean folklore and oral tradition, but also representations of gendered counter-myths, rites, and ritual healings operate as sites of Cliff's rebellious poetics. I will argue that the author is conjuring up a viable feminist past, a Caribbean *herstory*, needed in order to relocate a displaced feminist/postcolonial agency. In order to fully examine Cliff's herstories, I turn to the notion of "matrilineal genealogy" as a constituent of the Caribbean female identity in Chapter Five. I will pay attention to the logic of three generations in her novels: the descriptions of rebellious grandmother and othermother figures are contrasted with the representations of colonized mothers who struggle within imperial ideologies and destructive self images. My claim is that it is the feminist daughter who is able to find her cultural "home" and to construct decolonial feminist identity after re-figuring her matrilineal heritage. Thus, I argue that Cliff's novels become stories of daughters' *Bildung* describing their troubled journey towards re-found Caribbean heritage "scattered as potash in the cane fields" (LLB, 14). In order to examine how Cliff's narratives discuss gendered and sexual norms, which are the topic of Chapter Six, I need to establish her counter-discourses. Consequently, in Chapter Six I move

on to the questions of sexuality and queered histories. In this chapter, I will consider how the queered representations vary in each of the novels providing a corollary survey of the changing field of theorizing sexualities. Overall, my aim is to examine how gendered, ethnic, sexual or other categorizations of identity become on the one hand culturally creolized, and on the other hand, historically contingent on Michelle Cliff's textual journey towards a re-written, transnational, feminist agency.

### 1.1. Michelle Cliff's Works in the Context of Caribbean and US Migrant Writing

Michelle Cliff was born in November 1946 in Kingston Jamaica. In the early 1960s she moved to New York with her family and began school there. Her parents worked in the fields of economy and administration, and they fared well compared to other immigrant families. The Cliff family maintained their middle-class life style, and her light-skinned parents did not participate in the political movements of the 1960s. The solid economic status of the family made it possible for them to commute between Jamaica and the USA. Michelle Cliff has named the racial passing of her family as a schizophrenic experience, but also as a mode of self-protection (Adisa 1994, 275). Her parents could and wanted to pass as whites, even though they felt uncomfortable because of their experiences of racism. Nevertheless, Cliff herself has claimed Jamaica as her home and she still retains her Jamaican citizenship. (See MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 17; Adisa 1994; Schwartz 1993.)

At university Michelle Cliff majored in European History and graduating with a B.A. in 1969 from Wagner College, New York. She started a career as an editor, and in the early 1970s she moved to London and completed her M.A. in the Italian Renaissance at the Wartburg Institute. After returning to the USA, Cliff advanced in her career in publishing, and in the late seventies she began to publish a lesbian feminist journal, *Sinister Wisdom*, together with the feminist scholar Adrienne Rich. Cliff's first collection of poetry *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* was published in 1980. The collection depicts a psychic displacement of a light-skinned Creole, her feelings of alienation, the prejudices of the surrounding society, and the problems of passing. Her next literary production was a semi-autobiographical novel called *Abeng*, published in 1984, describing the life of a pre-teen light-skinned girl, Clare Savage, growing up in Jamaica. Clare's *Bildung* is filled with ambivalence and contradictions regarding skin-color, class, gender, and awakening sexuality. In 1985, Cliff published a collection of prose poems and essays called *Land of Look Behind*, which carries on the major themes of *Abeng*, depicting now the consequences of the multiple simultaneous oppressions and the feelings of alienation in more generalized terms. For example, the story of Anne Frank, which haunts the protagonist in *Abeng*, is included in the collection as well. The collection also includes some of the same characters as *Abeng*. Two years later, in 1987, Cliff's second novel *No Telephone to Heaven* was published. The novel

continues the story of Clare Savage into her adult years, migrating between the USA, the UK, and Jamaica.

As MacDonald-Smythe concludes, Michelle Cliff's literary voice undergoes some "tonal modifications" (2001, 181) after the eighties. Her writings from the 1980s could be called more Caribbean in the sense that they are reclaiming the Caribbean island as a home, while the works from the 1990s relocate the themes of resistance, dislocation and home into a more transnational space where the protagonists seek alternative homes (see MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 18-20, and 181-4). In 1990, Cliff published a collection of short stories, originally issued separately in various literary magazines. The collection was named *Bodies of Water*, symbolizing the central themes of its short stories, namely the transition, journeying, and crossing the borders. The other themes in the collection deal with issues such as abandonment and solitude. Many of the stories' characters feel alienated due to racism, sexism, homophobia, or the sheer evil-mindedness of someone else. The Holocaust, the Vietnam War, domestic violence, slavery, and the violation of civil rights remain in the backgrounds of these traumatized characters. A similar shared experience of oppression is also the main focus of Cliff's latest novel to date, *Free Enterprise* (1993).<sup>6</sup> It consists of an assemblage of historical story-lines concerning the abolitionary struggles in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The novel highlights the many different forms of resistance conducted by subordinate groups, whether Jews, women, African Americans, Caribbeans, or lepers. While their struggles might be different, the experience of resistance is shared. *Free Enterprise* makes the reader particularly aware of the multiple and intersecting systems of oppression and the unstable nature of identity categories.

In 1998, Cliff published yet another collection of short-stories, *Store of a Million Items*, which once again examines the themes of finding a home in transnational cultural world and the shared experience of homelessness between differently marginalized people. The United States, metaphorically represented in the collection as a store selling almost anything, cannot offer the protagonists of the stories safety. Ten years later, in 2008 Cliff published a book-length collection of non-fictional essays called *If I Could Write This in Fire*. The collection reflects her own journeys in Jamaica, England, and the USA. Cliff's personal experiences are intertwined with the history of violence, colonialism, even genocide, while the plights of Jamaican history are also woven into the writings. The theme of history is carried on in her most current collection of short stories published in 2009, *Everything is Now*. The title refers to the continued presence of the past in our lives on the psychological level. Yet, on a more collective level, the collection focuses on characters who need to gather their own history from stories and items not displayed in the museums. In addition to her own literary career, Cliff has also taught creative writing at several universities, and currently lives in California.

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6 The novel was re-printed in the fall of 2004. A sub-title was added to the second edition, and the novel was called *Free Enterprise. A Novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant*. In this study, I use the first edition.



Despite Cliff's current location, her literary works are commonly included in Caribbean literary histories.<sup>7</sup> Robert Aldrich creates a synthesis of the Caribbean literary periods by starting from oral literature, or "oraliture", as he calls "the cultural voice of the slaves", which survived well into the twentieth century to become echoed in the contemporary literature (Aldrich 1995, 104). The early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the Caribbean novel with authors such as Herbert G. de Lisser, Thomas H. MacDermot, or Claude McKay, who later migrated to the USA. However, the colonial period for literature means assimilation to the ideal of the mother-country, which Aldrich names as *francité* in the francophone context (Aldrich 1995, 105). The literary assimilation meant that those who were able to write literature and who had access to books and education had to master the colonial language and modes of art. Nonetheless, in his early work *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (1970), Kenneth Ramchand points out distinctive characteristics of early West Indian novels. He draws attention to their particular way of depicting surrounding society "with unusual urgency and unanimity to an analysis and interpretation of their society's ills, including the social and economic deprivation of the majority; the pervasive consciousness of race and color; the cynicism and uncertainty of the native bourgeoisie after independence; the lack of a history to be proud of; and the absence of traditional settled values" (Ramchand 1970/1983, 4). Ramchand's characterisation reflects an urgent need for more powerful depictions, which engage with identity politics. The literary achievements of the *Négritude*-movement were one answer to this need.

The literary *Négritude*-movement emerged in Paris during the 1930s. The artists and authors of African and Caribbean origins in the movement were inspired by the search for African roots. They turned to Mother Africa when looking for history and the heritage of their own while wanting to define the particular African sensibility. The word *négritude* first appeared in a lengthy poem *Cahiers d'un retour au pays natal* (1939, transl. *Notebook of the Return to the Native Land*) by the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire. The movement had an immense effect on Caribbean art and literature, also beyond the Francophone islands. Jamaican literary circles at that time, however, were involved with the Independence movement. *Négritude* was among the first art movements in Europe to define aesthetics not based on Eurocentric ideals. Another Martinican, theoretician and psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon, however, criticized the movement for being too tied to the past and stressed the commitment to a more universal revolution in the name of liberation. As he states in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952, transl. *Black Skins, White Masks*) the important journey for a Caribbean is neither to Europe nor to Africa but to the "global plane of revolution" (qtd. in Aldrich 1995, 112). Anglophone West Indian literature became widely recognized in 1950s, to the extent that previous writing from the region is often overlooked in literary histories. The center of this boom, however, seems to have been London instead of

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7 Cliff's works are included in several anthologies and literary histories of Caribbean literature. See for example *Our Caribbean* 2008, *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* 2001, *West Indian Literature* 1995, *Defining Jamaican Fiction* 1996, *Her True-True Name. Women's Writing from the Caribbean* 1989 – to name a few. In 1996, editor Pamela Maria Smorkaloff even entitled her anthology of Caribbean literature *If I Could Write This in Fire: An Anthology of Literature from the Caribbean*. The main heading comes from Cliff's essay.



the Caribbean itself, as the city hosted writers such as George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon (Donnel 2006; 11, 15).

According to Aldrich, the ideas envisioning a more syncretic, multi-voiced Caribbean Creole culture increased during the 1970s. One of the most important persons behind these ideas was Edouard Glissant, who demanded that West Indian culture should “repatriate itself to the Caribbean” and discover the strengths of “creolité” itself – its many hybrid characteristics, religions, languages and traditions. Neither colonial Europe, nor mythical Africa, nor Utopian revolution, were as important as the acceptance and value of the multifaceted Caribbean tradition (Aldrich 1995, 112-115). One of the most widely known of the Caribbean “Creolité” writers is the Martinican, Patrick Chamoiseau. Glissant draws on Félix Guattari’s and Gilles Deleuze’s theorizations of rhizomes in conceptualizing Creolité-identity as rooted and not rooted at the same time. In an Anglophone context, among many others, the Barbadian author and thinker Edward Kamau Brathwaite and the St. Lucian Nobel laureate poet Derek Walcott have regarded Creole society and culture as a unique continuum of constant cultural mixings forming not a unity but an array of syncretizations.

In the 1970s, Caribbean literature embraced the themes of boundaries, borders, and oppressive definitions. Many novels of this period described the individual experiences of alienation, loss of home, despair, and even madness in a culture which seemed to have lost its history. The privileges and oppressions following from the racist and classist institutions of Caribbean (post)colonial societies were also thematized in these novels. Moreover, the questions of migration and displacement were common topics in literature, which was also the case of US minority literatures of that time. These themes were often developed in autobiographical fiction describing the painful *Bildung*-process of a young protagonist. In addition, female, and particularly, girl protagonists in particular became more common in the autobiographical fiction of the seventies. (See Baugh 1995, 64-9.) Examples of such novels include *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970) by Merle Hodge and *La Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1972, transl. *The Bridge of Beyond*) by Simone Schwartz-Bart. The 1970s form the period of identity politics in Caribbean literature during which a heightened interest in defining the local and specific Creole identities dominated literary production after the migrant themes of the 1960s. Edward Kamau Brathwaite was perhaps one of the most prolific writers at this time. Moreover, such African American influences as black consciousness, the black aesthetics movement and political radicalism made a massive impact also on Caribbean literature, together with the use of Creole languages and indigenous vernaculars (see e.g. Maes-Jelinek and Ledent 2001).

During the 1980s, Caribbean literature became more widely known globally. As Bénédicte Ledent notes, a new generation of Caribbean writers “adopted a more dynamic view of selfhood, one in which the fragmentation inherited from history is no longer a failure” but a “source of creolized sensibility” (Ledent 2000, 77). However, these works were mainly written and published abroad. The moment of apotheosis for Caribbean literature was Derek Walcott’s acceptance of the Nobel Prize in 1992. Moreover, during the 1980s Caribbean literary studies

developed rapidly, leading to re-writings of literary histories and more local canon formations – new genealogies of art were urgently needed. Consequently, the early Caribbean slave narrative, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by herself*, first written in 1831, and often regarded as the first Caribbean novel, was re-published in 1987. The new emerging field of postcolonial scholarship took an early interest in Caribbean writing and its unique mixture of cultures. In the Anglo-American, as well as Francophone postcolonial studies, the Caribbean has formed a major frame of reference (see e.g. Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Édouard Glissant, Frantz Fanon). In 1990 the first scholarly anthology concerning Caribbean women's writing *Out of the Kumbula. Caribbean Women and Literature* (edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido) was published starting a vibrant and ongoing series of studies.

Many women authors, such as Michelle Cliff, Jamaica Kincaid, Pauline Melville, Zee Edgell and Erna Brodber published their first novels during the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> The Anglophone Caribbean women's writing of the 1980s seems to be quite consistent in terms of topic, and to a lesser extent, writing style. Race, colonialism, the local oral tradition, and the search for collective identity were some of the basic themes. Education, religion, resistance, and 'coming-of-age' were also common themes. In addition, many authors sought out and re-wrote Caribbean history, which had been silenced by Western historiography. The personal and political were intertwined, and the individual processes of searching for one's identity were seen metonymically, as representing the larger processes of tracing collective, national identities. Women's writing presented an acute awareness of the multifaceted, intersecting systems of subordination, mainly those of gender, ethnicity, and class (see Juneja 1995, 89), which is not very far from the concurrent struggles of US feminists of color. For Carine M. Mardorossian, for example, this phase means "a relational model of identity" which challenges the separatism of identity politics favoring more contingent workings of differences (Mardorossian 2005, 3).<sup>9</sup> These themes – alongside literary forms such as first person narration, autobiographical elements, transliterations of oral tradition, and a strong commitment to matrilineal heritage – are also central elements in Michelle Cliff's writing.

8 Many Caribbean literary histories have cherished the narrative which Alison Donnell labels "a myth of a doubled spontaneous genesis" referring to the idea that 1950s London witnessed the boom of male writers (Lamming, Selvon, Naipaul) which was followed by a second boom centered on Jamaica "with a sudden 'explosion' of women writers" in the 1980s (Donnell 2006, 11). Donnell, however, points out that the myth renders previous Caribbean women writers invisible, and in her seminal study *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* (2006), highlights the long tradition of women writers that extends to the 1950s and beyond.

9 Mardorossian builds a three-phased model to conceptualize postcolonial Caribbean literature. For her, the first phase is the era of the 1950s and 1960s when a large corpus of literature focused on decolonizing rewritings based on "unitary notions of cultural and national identity" (Mardorossian 2005, 2). The second phase no longer highlighted nationalism as a serious alternative to imperialism, but rendered visible several kinds of cultural differences. The third phase of the 1980s and 90s re-imagines identities in a constant flux when different axes of identity are co-constituting each other (Mardorossian 2005, 2-3). Even though Mardorossian does not use the term "intersectionality" she articulates its objectives by using terminology such as "interconnectedness", "relation identity", or "denying discrete categories" (Mardorossian 2005, 3-4). The third phase for Mardorossian also involves transnationally connected identities and people, which in are also highlighted in Cliff's works of the 1990s. For the wide range of themes particular to the Caribbean women's writing see also Valovirta 2010, 15-20.

Mother and grandmother figures are also characteristic of the 1980s Caribbean women's writing. They were often depicted as the keepers of a de-colonized Caribbean past, the mediators of folklore and, as such, routes to a strong Caribbean female identity. Daughters, instead, were often represented as seekers, either homeless migrants alienated by many kinds of power structures, or as fighters capable of resisting oppressive structures. The theme of sexuality has a particular, ambivalent role in Caribbean women's writing. As Elina Valovirta explains in her study *Sexual Feelings: Reading, Affectivity and Sexuality in a Selection of Anglophone Caribbean Women's Writing* (2010) the sexuality is "an ambivalent and contested terrain" having a range of attributes of affective associations (Valovirta 2010, 16). The interconnections between sexuality and affectivity "emerge laden with polarizations on a continuum of ambivalence, fluctuation and inconclusivity" (Valovirta 2010, 16). During the 1980s, Caribbean feminist literature drew a more diverse picture of local characters than the 1970s period of identity politics. For example, Cliff depicts a light-skinned Creole girl at crossroads of both black and white realities. In addition, Cliff's novels also gender the new, decolonizing "revolutionary" Caribbean literary tradition. As Belinda Edmondson notes, Cliff's works are among the very few novels where the masculine narrative tradition of revolution and resistance is transferred to represent female political agency.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, Michelle Cliff's recognition as a Jamaican author has also been contested while her right to use the "authentic" Jamaican voice has been questioned. Sometimes her "whiteness" has been seen as a sign of "Westernness" and her identification with the African Caribbeans as the arrogance of a rich American author. Even her feminism has aroused disapproval as it has been considered a reflection of her Western values.<sup>11</sup> The question about Cliff's authenticity came to a head in 1989 when Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson edited an anthology of Caribbean women's writing *Her True-True Name*. In the author biography, they are sceptical of Cliff's 'Caribbeanness' and comment on her skin-color, even though they include her writings in the anthology.<sup>12</sup> Cliff has responded to these reservations many times and emphasized the light-skinnedness as being more of a sign of class rather than 'race' in Jamaica. She has opposed biological boundaries in defining Caribbeanness and highlighted its hybrid nature (Schwartz 1993). In her essays and interviews, Cliff has sought to define Caribbean culture and literature as a site of diasporic, multicultural consciousness, and claimed recognition for authors living outside the islands. In her later works she has increasingly stressed transnationality and positions 'in-between'.

<sup>10</sup> Edmondson 1999, 126. Edmondson suggests that the particular Caribbean literary tradition, which she names as "the revolutionary tradition", developed in the novels of male authors such as Wilson Harris, George Lamming, C.L.R. James, and Derek Walcott. According to Edmondson, this "revolution of a black man" is changing into a feminist one in *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff and *Angel* (1987) by Merle Collins. (See Edmondson 1999, 105-38.)

<sup>11</sup> See more on this discussion e.g. MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 181; Strachan 2002, 225; Rody 2001, 152.

<sup>12</sup> Still, in the article published in 2006, Sika Elaine Dagbovie describes Cliff as someone "whose racial identification provokes scepticism" (Dagbovie 2006, 97).

I do not consider it necessary to frame Cliff's 'biographical' location as the primary context of her fiction. On the contrary, I seek to respect the textual locus of her novels, and explore the contexts her narratives themselves suggest. It seems clear enough that many of these narratives reflect American literary, political and cultural discussions; the queer-feminist themes and the transnational couplings of her writings draw on the US debates concerning the feminism of color, yet Caribbean sensitivities unquestionably permeate her novels. In this study, I therefore employ Anglo-American methodologies and studies of US minority literatures beside Caribbean feminist and literary sources. As MacDonald-Smythe concludes, "the discourse community that she [Cliff] is now part of is itself changing, as her location becomes increasingly transnational. Cliff's recent writings reflect the variety that is core to these discourse communities" and she is "constantly presenting new narratives of becoming from old versions of belonging" (MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 175). In recent literary discussions, Cliff's Caribbeanness is no longer questioned. Her works have been established as representations of multicultural negotiations of diasporic identities. (See MacDonald-Smythe 2001; 19, 174, 181.) My study of her novels also acknowledges these themes.

Light-skinnedness was not the only reason, why Cliff has been pushed into the margins of the Caribbean literary "canon". Her homosexuality has sometimes been seen as a form of European decadence, not acceptable in Jamaican culture. Cliff has been open about the lesbian themes in her novels as well as her own lesbian identity in all her writings and interviews, and proffers it as a reason why she cannot return to Jamaica, a "repellently homophobic society" (Schwartz 1993, 601). Jamaica remains in her novels as a place which is not safe for gays and lesbians but, which is, nevertheless, home. She devotes her writings to Jamaican traditions and culture, and the heritage of Jamaican mothers and grandmothers, while emphasizing that she cannot ever live there (see MacDonald Smythe 2001, 18 and Schwartz 1993, 601-5). Therefore, I think, it is important to reflect on how Michelle Cliff, among other things, is creating textual space and re-writing a past for silenced Caribbean (homo)sexuality. Therefore methodologically, my aim is to apply the perspective described as "intersectionality" and remain theoretically more flexible, even though this study is widely contextualized in the field of postcolonial studies.

## 1.2. Postcolonial Methodology

Methodologically, my study of Michelle Cliff's novels draws heavily on postcolonial criticism. However, it broadly combines feminist, queer, and Caribbean studies, therefore approaching the theoretical perspective recently named as *intersectionality*. In this chapter I will define the theoretical concepts I use; terms such as postcolonial, power and discourse, identity and cultural identity, agency, Creole, intersectionality, and finally queer are discussed in more detail. My objective is to recognize both the differences within the Caribbean female identities, and their

socially constructed nature in the context of Cliff's fiction. Postcolonial literary studies<sup>13</sup> is generally understood as a critical method deconstructing colonial modes of representing in literature. According to Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt, postcolonial literary studies have many focuses: They might, on the one hand, concentrate on the cultural history of a particular minority group, in which case a postcolonial scholar concentrates on the gaps of historical colonial archives and confronts them by recovering oral "sources of cultural memory" (Singh and Schmidt 2000, 14). On the other hand, postcolonial scholarship might recognize double- or intersectional identity constructions and heterogeneity, while having an emphasis on "diverse voices within a 'single' group or location" (Singh and Schmidt 2000, 14). Moreover, the challenges of diaspora, migration, exile, multiply located subjectivities and borderland experiences are widely discussed.<sup>14</sup>

The themes of cultural negotiations and migrant movements have also led the way to strategically emphasizing communalities and to reconsiderations of whiteness as a "racial identity position" (Singh and Schmidt 2000, 15).<sup>15</sup> While Cliff re-writes the history of Caribbean women, her novels examine the multi-levelled assemblage of oppressive systems which classify a Creole woman as an outsider or an inappropriate person. Her novels re-claim the story of Caribbean women and give her a voice to tell her own versions. Cliff's mode of representation deconstructs the Western novel form, thereby contesting its reliability in structuring the colonial reality while creating a liberatory poetics for her transnational subjects. Thus, I think that the objectives of Cliff's "textual rebellion" are compatible with both the emancipatory and the epistemological frames of postcolonial studies.

### 1.2.1. Terminology, History and the Future

Postcolonial studies is an umbrella term for a number of concepts, and it is necessary to define a few of them here. I will base my use of terminology on the definitions by Singh and Schmidt, mentioned earlier, but also on more "classic" postcolonial texts such as those by Elleke Boehmer, Ania Loomba, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffin, and Helen Tiffin. I will use the term *imperialism* to refer to either military or symbolic power over another country or nation. Imperialism thus denotes an expansion of the European colonial rule during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while *colonialism* refers to both the consolidation and the manifestation of the imperial power (see Boehmer

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13 My use of the word "postcolonial studies" is conscious, as it opposes the word "postcolonial theory": "The theory" refers more to one (and hegemonic) way of providing knowledge while "the studies" include a variety of critical work.

14 One of the central tropes in postcolonial studies seems to be the moving subject. For Zygmunt Bauman the idea of the "tourist" epitomizes postmodern life, for Bhabha it is the "migrant" that metaphorizes postcolonial life, for Said the "exiled", for Deleuze and Guattari "a nomad", while Stuart Hall writes about "diasporic subjects", to give a few examples.

15 Singh and Schmidt divide postcolonial studies in USA into several schools. One of them is the "border school" whose research agenda is discussed here. Caribbean studies is widely taught in US universities. I find the US postcolonial research context, and the agenda of "border school" most appropriate for my study (see Singh and Schmidt 2000, 6).

1995, 2). According to Boehmer, colonialism also signifies “the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants” (Boehmer 1995, 2). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin use the word *colonialism* to name an ideology connected to the European processes of modernization, industrialization, and its need for raw materials. For them, the relation between the colonizer and the colonized is based on stabilized racial hierarchies: colonialism includes a “‘civilizing’ task involving education and paternalistic nurture”, a so-called “white man’s burden” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2002, 47). It poses the ideas and values of the colonizer as the natural order of things. It is noteworthy, however, that there is a vital difference between the terms *colonialism* and *colonial* – the latter being not so much an ideology as it is an overall “ethos”, the culture created by the colonialist presence.

If the concepts *colonialist* and *colonial* are applied to narratives, their difference becomes clearer. According to Boehmer, colonial narratives reflect the colonial ethos without actually depicting imperialism. Colonial is a more general term meaning “writing concerned with colonial perceptions and experience, written mainly by metropolitans, but also by Creoles and indigenes, during colonial period” (Boehmer 1995, 2). The colonial order is typically presented as ‘natural’ and unquestioned within these narratives. Colonialist narratives, on the contrary, describe colonization – its systems and consequences. Colonialist literature is written by Europeans to other Europeans, and as Boehmer underlines, it is “informed by theories concerning the superiority of European culture and the rightness of empire” (Boehmer 1995, 3). While the colonial order is widely described in Cliff’s novels, they criticize it and deconstruct its legitimized nature, making them therefore *postcolonial*.

Terms *postcolonialist* and *postcolonial* have recently been applied in various ways. In this study ‘postcolonial’ is the critical term referring a cultural space where colonialism is over but its effects still impact on the peoples and their society. Postcolonial criticism aims to examine the very mechanisms, such as art, language, or gender systems which are still imbued with colonialist modes of thinking. Postcolonial refers to circumstances where previously colonized peoples can construct their historical subjectivities only in subordinating terms. According to Boehmer, “postcolonial” is an umbrella term including a diverse array of critical research and literature. Postcolonial writers sought to oppose discourses which supported colonization and “colonial order of things” – myths, classificatory systems, imageries of subordination. Postcolonial literature is therefore “deeply marked by experiences of cultural exclusion and division under empire” (see Boehmer 1995, 3).<sup>16</sup> Instead, ‘postcolonialism’, or postcolonialist practises, refer to an ideology or a perspective highlighting colonialist structures on the post-imperial era. Postcolonialist practises are analyzed by critical scholars and carry on strategies of colonialism. In some cases I also use the term *decolonial*, which in this study refers to the framework of

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16 Some theorists use the hyphenated form post-colonial (see e.g. Bongie 1998). Boehmer regards the hyphenated form as a temporal term referring to era after World War II (Boehmer 1995, 3). In this study I will consistently use the terminological logic outlined by Boehmer.

resisting and undoing the effects of colonialism. *Anticolonial* is the term which I use merely as an antonym for colonial.

Besides colonial/colonialism and postcolonial/postcolonialism a third pair of terms also appears frequently: *neocolonial/neocolonialism*. ‘Neocolonial’ refers to an era after the colonial order when multi-national corporations, global flows of capital, and unequal uses of resources stabilize, once again, the hierarchy between the West and the rest. Neocolonialist mechanisms are incorporated into economical structures of power thereby pursuing the colonialist dynamics within the developing countries (see Boehmer 1995, 9).<sup>17</sup> Finally, I assert that it is important to add that both postcolonial and neocolonial are problematic concepts. As Constance S. Richards notes, they highlight the colonial experience excluding other forms of experiences. For example, they are unable to describe the forms of oppressions African American and Native face (Richards 2000, 2).<sup>18</sup> We must also keep in mind, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note, that postcolonial studies do not insist on returning to some kind of precolonial “authentic” space. Rather, they address the network of hybrid relationships, and a dialogue with the European ways of thinking. She claims that postcolonial critique is more a process than an arrival and refers to subverting, challenging, and new ways of reading (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2002, 20-1). This kind of a spectrum of critical re-readings and -writings can also be detected in Cliff’s novels. She uses narrative techniques which place the (colonial) story and the (postcolonial) counter-story in dialogue – thus rendering visible the Caribbean reality consisting of simultaneously existing systems of knowledge.

It is difficult to discuss postcolonial studies without referring to the concepts of “discourse” and “power” – the terms widely applied in the related research. These concepts are usually understood from a Foucauldian perspective as productive and intertwined. For Michel Foucault discourse is a system of language within which knowledge is produced. Discourse is not merely an array of conventions concerning what can be said or thought, but a domain rooted in human practises and institutions. It is the domain within which language is used *in a particular way* containing exercises of power (Foucault 2000, 120-31). Discourse is a field of social knowledge, the system of such propositions within which reality becomes interpreted. Discourses “organize social existence and social reproduction”, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin conclude (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002, 71). They are used by the subjects simultaneously enabling these subjects as agents of discourse. Therefore, in Foucault’s thinking power, is not a merely repressive relation of two or more subjects, but a productive use of discourse. In his *La volonté de savoir* (1976), Foucault summarizes his understandings of power. Foucault concep-

17 Singh and Schmidt, however, have a different emphasis in their understanding of “neocolonial”. They define neocolonial study as a type of theorizing which applies Marxist criticism to an analysis of global capitalism (Singh and Schmidt 2000, 19). I use the term “transnational” in my study for such discussions. (See for the definitions of “transnational” chapter 2.3.)

18 According to Richards, the term “post-independence” would be politically more correct. However, that is also insufficient in terms of e.g. African-American experience (Richards 2000, 2). This is one of the reasons she ends up using “transnationality” acknowledging many kinds of global movements and experiences of inequality, but also cultural interactions.



tualizes power as a complex network; it is understood as a multiplicity of power relations “immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization” (Foucault 1990, 92). For him it is essential that power is not a simple relation of authority but an attribute given to a complex situation in a particular social system. Power is “exercised from innumerable points” and in the interplay of unstable relations. Thus, it is not possible to “acquire”, “seize”, or “hold” power; it always slips away (Foucault 1990, 94).

For Foucault, power does not exist outside other social relations whether economical, intellectual, or sexual. Power always has objectives and implications, it is intentional yet nonsubjective, and coordinates social practises. The rationality of power is characterized by Foucault as “tactics explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed” (Foucault 1990, 95). In the context of the emancipatory aims of postcolonial studies it needs to be pointed out that Foucault, nevertheless, sees possibilities of resistance *within* the system of power. He emphasizes that power is always relational in nature and power relations can exist only dependable on “the multiple points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle on power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network” (Foucault 1990, 95). Below, I will use the concepts of *resistance* and *counter-discourse* conscious of the fact that they too exist inside discourse as “handles” of coloniality.<sup>19</sup>

Postcolonial literary research began to emerge during the last decades of the twentieth century in connection with poststructural, feminist, and so called constructivist, postmodern ways of theorizing. Furthermore, Marxist critiques of cultural hegemonies, and (identity) political movements of the sixties and seventies undergirded discussions of postcolonial criticism. Yet, Edward Said’s publication of *Orientalism* in 1977 has often been regarded as its starting point. In his study, Said applies Foucault’s theories in analysing how the “orient” was represented and encountered in Europe. Orientalism refers to European ways of seeing, naming, and stereotyping “the Orient” as its other.<sup>20</sup> This kind of perspective leans on categories such as “race” and “ethnicity”. Both terms are difficult to define, and as Stuart Hall states, they are often combined by their discursive structures (Hall 2000, 224). The scientific nature of the concept of

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19 See for a more detailed analysis about resistance and power Foucault 1990, 95-7. According to Foucault resistance may be e.g. spontaneous, savage, concerted, rampant, or violent. There is always a plurality of resistances in each context. They are not merely rebounds or reactions, even though they exist inside the strategic system of power; in the end passive and “doomed to defeat”. They are “the odd term” related to the power, the lure. They are inscribed into power as “an irreducible opposite”. Thus, the points of resistances, too, are distributed within discourse (Foucault 1990, 96).

20 Of course, postcolonial theorizing had also been influenced by earlier studies. Already W.E.B. Du Bois during the early years of twentieth century wrote about the “double consciousness” of African-Americans, and Frantz Fanon’s pathbreaking work in the 1950s used Lacanian psychoanalysis to study the self-reflection of “racialized” subject. Moreover, Caribbean writers such as C.L.R. James, Aimé Césaire and early Pan-Africanist thinker Marcus Garvey must be mentioned when looking for the roots of postcolonial thinking.



“race” has been widely discredited within the humanities and the natural sciences long ago.<sup>21</sup> In my study race refers to a discursive system of exclusion/oppression based on visible markers of difference from the white norm. I agree with Hall that race is a constituted system of socio-economic power and exploitation, which “naturalizes its effects” (Hall 2000, 222). Ethnicity, on the contrary, is regarded by Hall as “cultural belongingness” (Hall 2000, 233).<sup>22</sup> It is a concept referring to a *difference* based on culture and/or religion, rather than a difference based on a physical body. In his more fluid understanding of ethnicity Hall seems to be in dialogue with Werner Sollors who conceptualizes ethnicity, not as an authenticity or an ancient origin, but an acquired modern sense of belonging. As Sollors argues, it is not “any *a priori* cultural difference that makes ethnicity” but it is constituted in each generation as a powerful symbol providing the sense of originality (Sollors 1989, xvi & xi-xiv).

Of course, postcolonial studies, also faces new challenges. In the well established reader, *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005), some of these challenges are mapped. Globalization, economy, and the process of transculturation provided by media technology are definitely burning issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The group of editors of the reader agree with Simon Gikandi who argues that while “the intellectual power of the ‘narrative of decolonization’ has collapsed”, postcolonial scholars must redirect their criticism in a myriad and virtual directions instead of merely “wishing away Eurocentrism” (Loomba et al. 2005, 8), which requires a new multidisciplinary methodology. The empires have changed in the global world: the study of the U.S. economical Empire, its constitutive discourses and the ideological rhetorics of multinational corporations, absorbing models of imperialism, could benefit from postcolonial criticism (Loomba et al. 2005, 10-11). I propose that postcolonial ecocritical literary scholarship, for example, should be added to list of challenges. Moreover, it remains to be seen whether there will be something like “Materialist” postcolonial studies, in the footsteps of pioneers such as Aijaz Ahmed, for example, after the heavy narrative and textual turn of the field. At least Michelle Cliff’s novels would be a fertile field for many kinds of interpretations in their multifaceted textuality.

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21 In the field of critical studies in the 80s and 90s this was noted by using the term in quotes. They were to illustrate that the researcher was aware of the obsolete nature of ‘race’. In this study I will use the term “race” in a context of politics, not biology. It is a socially constructed category still present in many people’s everyday reality, and that is why I do not use quotemarks around it. However, race remains a contested category even in this political sense. Paul Gilroy, for one, distances himself from any kind of use of the term race in his controversial study *Against Race* (2000). Gilroy regards politicized identities which are based on race as “pious ritual in which we always agree that ‘race’ is invented but are then required to defer to its embeddedness in the world” [---] (Gilroy 2000, 52). Moreover, for Gilroy, the race-based politics means reactive attachment to a category whose origins can be traced to the dubious pseudosciences (see Gilroy 2000, 53).

22 According to Hall, it is important to acknowledge that recently the term “race” has been “ethnicized” whereas “ethnicity” has been “racialized”. He claims that biological racism and the talk about cultural difference are becoming more and more intertwined. They constitute “not two different systems but racism’s two registers” (Hall 2000, 223). The people of different ethnicity have been attached to physical features. According to Hall, this kind of racialised ethnicity, ethnicity rather than race “has provided the focus of violent exclusionary conflict (e.g. Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo)”. By “ethnicized race” Hall means the condition where a formerly negative racial epithet (e.g.) “black” has become a signifier of a positive cultural identification (Hall 2000, 224). This kind of articulation might, however, be a controversial one – in its tendency to obscure the differences between “race” and “ethnicity”. In my study I will use the term ‘ethnicity’ to refer to the Caribbean cultural background, with its particular creolized reality.

### 1.2.2. Local and Feminist contestations

Gendered identities are sensitive to issues concerning geopolitical locations, diasporas, transnationality, and several types of colonial hegemonies. Postcolonial feminism has acknowledged the differences within ethnic groups, as well as theorizing the socially constructed nature of femininity. Postcolonial feminism has strongly criticized the tendency to produce stereotypical images concerning the “third world woman” within dominant discourse.<sup>23</sup> The work of Gayatri Spivak has been ground-breaking regarding historiography and postcoloniality. From the 1980s onwards her deconstructive work has been concerned with the imperial epistemologies of Western historiography and the ways of representing the “subaltern woman”. Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, originally published in 1988, problematized the categories of hegemonic language and their ability to operate as the medium of self-expression for subaltern women. According to her argument, the third world woman is constituted as a subaltern subject within the hegemonic language and as such unable to gain agency using the very language which already categorizes her as “speechless” (see Spivak 1988).<sup>24</sup>

Speechlessness is also widely studied by Caribbean authors and feminists. I will follow Lizbeth Paravisini-Gebert who advises Western scholars not to reduce particular Caribbean gendered experiences to U.S. or European theories of feminism and gender relations (Paravisini-Gebert 1997, 7). According to Paravisini-Gebert, one of the special features of Caribbean feminism is the leading role of female authors in political discussions, in creating a historiography, and in describing the female agency of resistance. Paravisini-Gebert mentions Michelle Cliff as one such author (Paravisini-Gebert 1997, 14). Rhoda Reddock, a Trinidadian feminist scholar, has also noted some particularities in Caribbean feminist thought. One of them is a multiplicity of differences that needs to be acknowledged. Caribbean feminism is not only a black feminist movement: a variety of female experiences of color must be recognized, including those of white Creole women whose struggle for postcolonial identity has been contested (Reddock 2001, 207), as is evident in Michelle Cliff’s works. Whiteness as a norm has been deconstructed in postcolonial theorizing and considered a socially constituted signifier. Ruth Frankenberg, for example, has emphasized the importance of displacing the colonial construction of whiteness as an “empty” cultural space (Frankenberg 1999, 457). African-American feminist theory migrated to the Caribbean during the 1990s under the auspices of ‘diasporic’ theory, as Alison Donnell reminds us, rather than through “any attention to the specificities of gender operations” in the area (Donnell 2006, 134). Donnell addresses problems in studies which try to map “African-American theory onto a Caribbean context” but which do not adequately take into account the ethnic diversity of the region (Donnell 2006, 135). In the first two novels by Cliff the problems

23 See e.g. Spivak 1987; Davies 1994; hooks 1997; Alexander and Talpade Mohanty 1997; Loomba 1998, 163-6; Singh & Schmidt 2000, 32-4.

24 The group of historians associated to Spivak (so called Subaltern Studies –school) has been widely influential in postcolonial studies. They have criticized the elitist interpretations of Western historiography concerning South-Asian history. (See for more on the school Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002, 216-9.)

of biracialism are a central theme as her autobiographical, light-skinned protagonist feels culturally and psychologically disconnected from the reality of her African Caribbean mother. Cliff's first two novels and several of her poems examine how her light-skinned, bi-racial protagonists feel weighted down by racial pedestals, which leads them to feel, in psychological sense, that they are disappearing.<sup>25</sup>

During the 1990s, many studies began to examine how 'whiteness', as a racial position, has been naturalized as non-color by hegemonic discourses. Critics such as Richard Dyer have analyzed the ways in which whiteness was legitimized as a position of power, while particularly many feminists note that whiteness is also divided by differences within. Whiteness differs along the lines of class, gender, and especially today, along the lines of religion. "Whiteness" and "Blackness", however, are not the only ethnicities to be considered in the Caribbean reality. The 1990s also marked the success of diasporic and migrant studies of women's writing often overshadowing the earlier archives of particular experiences and localized agendas.<sup>26</sup> Reddock raises voices belonging to the Indo-Caribbean women who have frequently occupied one of the most silenced positions. On the one hand, Reddock quotes Gemma Tang who points out that Caribbean feminism is affected by the fact that in the Caribbean area, on the contrary to e.g. USA, Black men have gained political power and control over the public sector. Tang writes "[the power] went from white men to black men; women did not feature in that equation. Caribbean women therefore have not found it necessary to differentiate feminism into 'black' and 'white'" (qtd. in Reddock 2001, 201).<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, she discusses the questions raised by Patricia Mohammed about the systems of overlapping patriarchies in the Caribbean. These competing patriarchies have led into a situation where women, in the name of community, "collude [---] in their own subordination" (Reddock 2001, 206). In her article, however, Reddock envisions the ways differences in the Caribbean can be a site of interconnectedness. I suggest that this kind of interconnectedness also epitomizes Cliff's transnational cultural location in-between the Caribbean feminism and the African American feminist movement. Her transnational feminism is issued most clearly in *Free Enterprise*, within which the collective social action rises from the shared experience of difference.<sup>28</sup>

25 See for the problems of biraciality in Cliff's fiction e.g. Dagbovie 2006.

26 See Donnell 2006, 140-1. For more on the pursuit of the diasporic paradigms in the Caribbean feminism see Donnell 2006, 130-80. As Donnell points out, "the Black Atlantic inflected studies of the 1990s" must not become a silencing device of the Caribbean women "as historical subjects" by celebrating the spontaneous appearance of the women's writing during 1980s and 1990s (Donnell 2006, 141 & 142). Indeed, Donnell remarks that "at present Caribbean feminist scholarship announces itself more directly in the disciplines of history, education and sociology than in literary criticism, a methodology that remains attached to a black diasporic paradigm" (Donnell 2006, 147).

27 This notion of political, in many cases even economical power, that African population has in the Caribbean area, and particularly in Trinidad and Tobago, is considerable. This has led to the larger sense of commonalities within the Caribbean feminist of different ethnic origins. "The bitterness characteristic of interethnic relations among feminists in North America and the United Kingdom is not as characteristic of the Caribbean region" (Reddock 2001, 205).

28 I am as impressed as Reddock by Patricia Mohammed's work. Even though Caribbean Feminism is marked by differences in a unique way (particular to creolized culture) the feminist articulations of these differences are "quite different from masculinist ones. They should also be conceptualizations that highlight our interconnectedness as well as our separatedness [---] that provide the basis for collective social action" (Reddock 2001, 208).

Postcolonial methodology has also been criticised within Caribbean Studies. Its “academic” and “elitist” commitments to Western ways of theorizing have aroused controversy: it has been seen so preoccupied with the constructions and deconstructions of identity positions that the particular, local everyday experience is blurred. Carole Boyce-Davies has argued that postcolonial theory is often too totalizing (Western, academic) discourse. Its “conceptual sweep” attempting to “contain all of these [non-Western] cultures, movements and peoples in some giant conglomerate-like, monolithic sprawl” (Davies 1994, 82). Postcolonial theory must be challenged to analyse, who has the right to develop new sites of identity – seldom the subject of postcolonial study.<sup>29</sup> According to Davies, it defines people as “minorities” and “subjectivities” and then forces people to act like one – “leaving us [...] forever forced to interrogate European discourses” (Davies 1994, 85). However, postcolonial thinking has developed a great deal since 1990s. It is no longer a monolithic field, and has not only risen from Western universities. For instance, Maureen Moynagh sketches an ethical turn in postcolonial theory which is to do with two simultaneous vectors: translocality and non-universality recognizing the regional differences. She uses the term “postnational” in order to signal “discomfort with universalizing impulses and a recognition of a [...] global which is not homogenous” (Moynagh 1999, 111 and 130). Moynagh considers that Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*, in particular, reflects the ethical translocality she connects to the ethical turn in postcolonial theory.

More current criticism of postcolonial theory has been published, for example, by Neil Lazarus, who complains that recent postcolonial scholarship has been too dogmatically connected with hybridities, multiculturalism, migrancy, liminality, and undifferentiating disavowal of nationalism. According to him, these kinds of studies end up repeating the same stories about unstable social identities, volatile truths, or constructed histories (Lazarus 2005, 424). Moreover, current postcolonial theorizing tends to register the presence of Anglophone writers who “adopt generic and modal conventions readily assimilable by Euro-American readers”, a sort “new cosmopolitan writing”, leaving out many interesting and revisionary forms of writing not fitting to multiculturalist paradigms (Lazarus 2005; 425, 428). Lazarus claims that postmodern-postcolonialist critics must come to terms with more heterogeneous groups of writing and perspectives. Postcolonial studies cannot afford to “misdiagnose a restricted mode of practise as a cultural universal” as postmodern-postcolonialists do (Lazarus 2005, 434-5).<sup>30</sup>

The postmodern paradigm concerns the Caribbean in many ways. The 1990s boom of diasporic/migrant studies began to see the Caribbean area as a theoretical utopia or an

29 Moreover, many materialist thinkers have criticized the “textualism” of 1990s postcolonial theory. Most notable among them are Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Benita Parry, Timothy Brennan, and Aijaz Ahmad. See Young 1995, 160-1, and Lazarus 2005, 423.

30 For more on recent criticism on postcolonial theory see Scott 2005. David Scott debates the “anti-essentialist dogma” which constructivist postcolonialism ends up repeating: for him, the constructivist paradigm is no more successful than the essentialist one, quite the contrary it has transformed Europe into a site of essences in its urge to reveal imperial agendas (Scott 2005, 392 and 395). I agree with Lazarus and Scott that postcolonial studies has taken a too paradigmatic standpoint on scholarship. However, for example feminism, intersectionality, and critical sexuality studies have yet a lot to offer to postcolonial studies. This is one of the reasons my study operates with as wide theoretical perspective as possible.

emblem of all that was syncretic, hybrid or deterritorialized. Donnell contests the idea of Caribbean identity “as always elsewhere” and challenges “the celebratory rhetorics of fashion migration” (Donnell 2006, 79) which risk to simplify the cultural complexity of the Caribbean diaspora. Provocatively speaking, every Caribbean literary character got the status of metropolitan migrant and this migrant became a leitmotif of the 1990s postcolonial novel. Indeed, Carole Boyce Davies names postcolonial theory as a master-narrative which, like postmodernism, legitimizes itself as a neutrally critical discussion. Thus Davies is demanding a decolonization of postcolonial studies (see Davies 1994, 80-92). I claim, however, that even though postcolonial aims to emancipate ‘the others’ according to Western humanist values are problematic, the achievements of postcolonial thinking in raising awareness and ethical discussions are indisputable. Indeed, in this study I will take the above mentioned criticisms at heart, and focus on particular Caribbean experience represented in Cliff’s novels with particular regard on Caribbean scholarship.

Consequently, many Caribbeanists have created methodological tools more suitable to particularly Caribbean problematics. Davies, for example, envisions her own methodological perspective, *critical relationality* which aims to wider negotiations between several theoretical views. It means articulating simultaneously a “variety of resistant discourses relationally and depending context, historical and political circumstances” (Davies 1994, 47). Critical relationality focuses on the shifting cultural space of Caribbean women, interrogation of variety of positions, and a fluidity of movement “which more like a spider web asserts itself in multiple ways” (Davies 1994, 48). It seems obvious to me that the grounds for theory later called as *intersectionality* is predicted here. Moreover, Belinda Edmondson and Tobias Döring, to name a few, have outlined different kinds of Caribbean methodologies in their writings. Edmondson has mapped the Caribbean aesthetics and Döring has named his perspective as *Poetics of Passages* (see Edmondson 1994, 1999; and Döring 2002). However, within all the postcolonial studies discussed in this dissertation, there is no “established” methodology on research concerning Michelle Cliff. Her works have been read in the contexts of mainstream American, African American, feminist, lesbian and queer, Caribbean Creole, as well as in the African Caribbean literary canon. Consequently, my own study aims to recognize her manifold cultural connections and focuses on intersectional ways of theorizing.

### 1.3. Intersectionality and Identity as Research Concepts

During the last decade, “intersectionality” has acquired a viable position within the postcolonial field of theorizing. It often appears that it has become self-evident, something that goes without saying. Every scholar needs to recognize the simultaneous effects racism, sexism, homophobia, and other structures of oppression have in our research material. Contemporary use of “intersectionality”, as Jennifer Nash argues, provides “a vocabulary to respond to critiques of identity politics” and its tendency to transcend differences (Nash 2008, 2). What bothers me in these discussions is the axiomatic nature of intersectionality. What does “intersectionality” mean and how does it operate methodologically? What kind of epistemological presuppositions are included in the term? In this section my aim is to define *my* use of this controversial concept, and to highlight those epistemologies the scholar is entangled in when applying this concept. This “epistemology of intersectionality” provides a background for my readings of Michelle Cliff’s novels and clarifies the context within which I use the concepts defined below – namely identity, Creole and queer. For example, as noted above, Michelle Cliff has been forced to negotiate between her national and sexual identities. These negotiations, *par excellence*, are a site of intersectionality. As Kimberly Crenshaw, a law scholar who coined the term intersectionality, argues “because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (Crenshaw 1989, 140). I agree more with the later use of the term, which I will introduce below, emphasizing that it is not only Black women’s identity, which is considered intersectional. I think that intersectionality is not merely a tool for mapping the oppressions but a concept of locating culturally and socially constituted identities.

First, I will clarify how the multi-dimensional concepts of identity and hybridity are understood in my study: I regard identity as processual assemblage of intersecting axes, not an essential entity. According to the conceptualizations of Stuart Hall, identity emerges as culturally constructed and contextualized positions of the self, such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, cultural location, or sexuality (see Hall 1992a). These axes are overlapping, shifting – or sometimes even conflictual and inconsistent – identities are decentered into several discourses. They are in a constant flux situating the self differently depending on the contexts. We project ourselves into our cultural identities through the processes of identifications. Therefore, identities are historically, not biologically defined. For Hall, they are “formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us” (Hall 1992a, 277). After all, Hall claims, a fully “unified, completed, secure and coherent

identity is a fantasy” (Hall 1992a, 277).<sup>31</sup> In my thinking, however, these fantasies are the very ways we define ourselves. They are combined to form biographies, and are represented in art, culture, and the media based on identity politics. Stuart Hall claims that if we have a sense of unified identity, it is only because “we construct a comforting story or a ‘narrative of the self’ about ourselves” (Hall 1992a, 277). In this study, my use of identity is thus “a comforting narrative”, but a narrative which must be processed and pursued, made socially recognizable. This study aims to explore the intersectional identity narratives Cliff represents in order to claim social recognition for her multiply positioned transcultural subjects.

In terms of identity, Paul Gilroy notes that one of the most urgent tasks for postcolonial theory is to overcome the binarism between essentialism and constructivism. (Gilroy 1996, 80-102.) Interestingly, Chris Bongie takes Gilroy’s challenge by envisioning the “Creole continuum of post/colonial identity politics” (Bongie 1998; 52, 70). He reads Edouard Glissant’s writings on Creolité which deconstruct the authentic essences and permanent identities re-visioning them as “convergences of re-rootings” with “capacity for variation” (Bongie 1998, 66-7). I agree with Bongie who claims that “some kind of reconstructive processes must follow the de-constructive efforts” of identity processes (Bongie 1998, 66). These reconstructive processes mean intersectional conceptualizations identity, transformative discourses for the self rather than re-defining pre- or de-colonial essences. In the context of Cliff’s writings this kind of continued presence of identity-seeking, however phantasmatic it may be, is a fruitful starting point in order to re-map her strategies of “converging re-rootings”, or transforming identity-discourses.

As “rootings”, cultural identities are located narratives. According to Stuart Hall, specific sites of identifications<sup>32</sup> are becoming even more significant in the post-colonial era. Modern identities erode as a result of globalization making new hybrid (localized) identities more viable (Hall 1992a, 300). Moreover, Hall claims that identities are situated along the lines of “imaginary geography” meaning senses of place, or home, and the invented traditions binding the past and the present. In addition, identities are situated in “myths of origins which project the present back into the past” but are “deeply implicated in representations” (Hall 1992a, 301). Here the

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31 This kind of understanding of identity invokes also some problems. If identities are conceptualized in semiotic and constructivist terms, how do politics or political resistance emerge? If stable identity categories are deconstructed and rendered re-citable, the conditions constituting them are surely rendered vulnerable for examination. As Judith Butler notes “The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstructions of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated” (Butler 1999, 189). It remains necessary to lay claim to oppressed identity categories, to use them strategically, as Butler envisions (1993, 229). The political claim is connected to the iterative nature of the sign (in this case, identity category). As a sign, e.g. the identity category can be contextualized differently in different processes of signification including the possibility of change. In the context of Cliff’s novels it is the colonial imagery which is re-written and rendered hybrid. About politics and reiteration see Derrida 2000, in particular pp. 25. In the context of “queer” and possibilities queer politics see Butler 1993, in particular pp. 223-42.

32 Hall uses of the term “identification” in two different ways: On the one hand, in everyday language, it means a recognition of something in common; some common origins, or characteristics “with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the [...] allegiance established of this foundation” (Hall 1996, 2). On the other, as far as poststructuralism is concerned, identification is a process of “articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption”, it is a signifying practise and thus subjected to the “play of difference” constructing significations. Thus, it is “a fantasy of incorporation” (Hall 1996, 3).



continuum of cultural identities envisioned by Bongie becomes clear. On the one hand, the illusion of permanence and authenticity is rendered necessary for the creation of cultural identities, but, on the other hand they are also implicated in representations. This leads to two sets of questions: in terms of essentialist identity politics we would examine what are “the home”, “the past”, and “the origins” like, while in terms of constructivism we would ask, how they are constituted. My hypothesis is that both questions need to be asked in order to fully understand Cliff’s problematizations of Caribbean female identities.<sup>33</sup>

After having published his articulations about *cultural identity* Hall reflects on them from a Caribbean perspective. He argues that, because the search for identity always involves a search for origins, it is particularly difficult for Caribbean people. It is “impossible to locate in the Caribbean an origin for its peoples” (Hall 2001, 26).<sup>34</sup> The past origins are lost, there is “no fifteenth-century Mother Africa” waiting, but the “imagined community” of Africa, or the point of origins, must be symbolically invented (Hall 2001, 35). For him, particularly Caribbean cultural identities, in particular, are deeply involved in representations: “they are always questions about the invention, not simply the discovery, of tradition” (Hall 2001, 26). Yet, for Hall, these kinds of “imagined origins”, or objects of nostalgia, are needed to constitute located identities.<sup>35</sup> Aligning myself with Hall, I suggest that representations shape and re-shape our cognitions, experiences, and objects of nostalgia. For Cliff, the creating of constitutive nostalgia means “retracing the African past of ourselves, reclaiming as our own, and as our subject, a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the cane fields, or gone to bush, or trapped in a class system” (LLB, 14). This defines the impetus of her work; she is creating healing fictions of the past in order to make new sites for identifications. The process of (re)inventing identifications is, however, further radicalized in Cliff’s fiction by her queered and creolized intersectional contestations.

Thus, in this study the subject is more of a philosophical structure, meaning the agent’s place within the discourse, whereas identity is understood as a personal process negotiated within one’s cultural and social reality. By agency, I refer to a subject’s capacity to act within a discourse. In his widely read articles “Signs Taken for Wonders” and “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern” (1995), Homi K. Bhabha explains his understanding of agency within the

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33 See for more on the discussions on essentialism and constructivism in the Creole context in Bongie 1998, 46-75. Even though Bongie’s aim is to criticize essentializing identity politics, he notes that even a “Creole identity betrays the unceasing process of transformations” because in practical use, the affirmations of fixed identity are inevitable (Bongie 1998, 11).

34 See more for the idea of “origins” and the myth of the pure and de-colonized land Griffiths 1995. In constructivist terms reality without colonialism is also a fantasy. There is no island “uncontaminated” by Western conceptualizations. Postcolonial writing such as Cliff’s novels, however, creates these myths in order to make politics rather than to return or retrieve something authentic or original. “The myth of Authenticity”, a term used by Gareth Griffiths, refers to this kind of illusionary nature of origins. However, the myth of authenticity has been efficiently questioned and deconstructed by authors sometimes called as “migrant cosmopolitans” (e.g. by Neil Lazarus) who highlight themes such as homelessness, rootlessness, cosmopolitanism, cultural displacement, migrancy, emigration, and different kinds of in-between identities in their works. Writers such as Bharati Mukherjee, Michelle Cliff, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, M.G. Vassanji, Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith, Joan Riley, Yoko Tawada, and many others have created such texts. See for more on the deconstruction of myth of authenticity Griffiths 1995, and Gikandi 1996, 194-205.

35 For Hall this kind of “other Africa”, in the Jamaican context, was constructed in the language and the rituals of Rastafarianism (Hall 2001, 35).



poststructuralist frame of reference. Interestingly, he focuses on the agency of the subaltern or colonized subject. Bhabha articulates his views along the Derridean guidelines within which the sign always has an iterative nature. The sign is defined as a difference from other signs – they are vulnerable to appropriation and reiteration. Bhabha analyzes how certain signs, which appear in the colonial discourse, are imbued with authoritative power, thus turning into the symbols of the same power. As authoritarian symbols are re-contextualized, they are detached from the conditions within which their nature as symbols was legitimized. According to Bhabha, this moment of detachment is a potential articulation of subaltern agency:

It allows the articulation of subaltern agency to emerge as relocation and reinscription. In the seizure of the sign [---] there is a contestation of the given symbols of authority that shift the terrains of antagonism. The synchronicity on the social ordering of symbols is challenged within its own terms, but the grounds of engagement have been displaced in supplementary movement that exceeds those terms. This is the historical movement of hybridity as camouflage, as a contesting, antagonistic agency functioning in the time lag of sign/symbol, which is a space in-between the rules of engagement. It is this theoretical form of political agency I've attempted to develop [---] (Bhabha 1995, 193).

Bhabha also defines his view on “hybridity” here – a term postcolonial research started using after the phase of identity politics in the 1960s and 1970s, while moving towards theorizing more complicated and constructed conceptualizations of identity.

The constructivist phase of theorizing identities is often referred to as “postessential politics” (Bongie 1998, 11)<sup>36</sup>. The postessential politics of the 1990s recycled concepts such as *mimicry*, *hybridity* and “*third space*” introduced by Bhabha. As a theoretical concept “hybridity” is still widely used, and I will continue to apply it to my analysis of creolized narratives, which create something more than the sum of African and European components – a form much used by Cliff. The term hybridity roused a lot of controversy after it started to appear in theoretical texts. One of its critics Robert Young argued that “hybridity” draws from the gloomy tradition of natural sciences (Young 1995, 6-19). In addition, scholars such as Benita Parry, Aijaz Ahmad, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty have, for example, remarked that the concept is too idealistic, or invalidates the particularities and unique histories of each cultural locations.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, hybridity, as a “space in-between” and as a possible site of re-conceptualisation and agency, encapsulates my use of the term. I consider hybridity as something more than the sum of the parts. According to Bhabha, hybridity emerges from a “third space of enunciation”

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36 Chris Bongie critiques postessential politics for not being the sufficient one. He claims that provisional affirmations of identity are often “politically necessary, notwithstanding the fact that they are theoretically ‘unviable’” (Bongie 1998, 11).

37 About the criticism see Singh & Schmidt 2000, 24-5 and Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 2002, 119-21. See also Stuart Hall's reply on Young's criticisms. He considers Young's remarks as “semantic quibbling” (Hall 2000, 240).

(Bhabha 1995, 37).<sup>38</sup> The third space of enunciation renders ambivalent the symbolic nature of the colonial sign, thus enabling the subaltern to take advantage of its ambivalence. Through ambivalence, the rules of recognition are resisted, and the resistance of the subaltern becomes possible. Therefore, I consider the concept of resistance in connection to creativity and hybridity; it is the possibility to articulate anew. In this study my aim is to analyze how Michelle Cliff uses hybrid representations as sites of resistance. Her textual rebellion, I argue, is not merely to reveal colonial stories and create indigenous counter-stories, but to play with the two by drawing on the third space between them. Furthermore, Cliff's textual ambivalence provides sites for intersectional identity processes.

A scholar who is using intersectional approaches is usually interested in questions concerning art, culture, multicultural issues, or transnational hybridities. She analyzes socio-political structures and their relations to knowledge-production embedded with gendered, sexualized, national, ethnic, class or other such premises. The knowledge-production is understood as a site, according to Foucauldian lines of argumentation, of subjectification. Within this process of subjectification, a subject does not only gain his/her agency but also several positions regarding of identity, gendered, national, cultural, religious and such. These positions can be ambivalent or exclusive and a person is forced to negotiate between them. Moreover, the process is always historically contingent and imbued with ideology. What does this kind of language tell about intersectionality?

In my understanding of intersectionality, identity positions are culturally constructed within the structures of power and knowledge. These positions are unstable and performative in nature, but they tend to operate together combining "fantasies" of coherent identity.<sup>39</sup> These "identity positions" or "constructed categories" are often called as "axes" or "vectors" of identity within intersectional scholarship (see e.g. Nash 2008.) Intersectionality investigates the complexity accumulating as these axes of identity are intersecting. According to Leslie McCall, this complexity lies at the heart of intersectionality (McCall 2005, 1772). Intersectionality emerged from the critique which was posed to the excluding paradigms of identity politics in the 1990s. At the same time, the concept started to appear in titles of anthologies. Although Black feminist scholarship introduced intersectional perspectives in the early seventies by combining class interests with gender specific issues (without actually naming the combinations as intersectional), the Black feminist writers articulated directly the problems of multiple simultaneous

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38 The term 'hybridity' is used in various ways in postcolonial theorizing. Stuart Hall emphasizes that it neither describes "the mixed racial composition of population" nor refers to "hybrid individuals, who can be contrasted as fully fully-formed subjects with 'traditionals' and 'moderns' " but a logic of cultural translation, which is "agonistic because it is never completed, but rests with undecidability" (Hall 2000, 226). Hybridity refers to new kinds of combinations and new syntheses, even controversial ones. According to Hall hybridization is not assimilationist but includes aspects of radical dislocation and complexity, and "hybridity marks the place of this incommensurability" (Hall 2000, 227). See for more on the use of the term "hybridity" and "hybridization" Mercer 2000 and Canciani 2000. They both counsel the scholars caution with the term in order to avoid re-building essentializing oppositions with "cultural purity".

39 According to Stuart Hall the formations of coherent identities are inevitably "fantasies" (Hall 1992a, 277). Similarly Judith Butler demands to "mobilize the necessary error of identity" (Butler 1993, 229).

oppressions.<sup>40</sup> I will connect my methodological use of intersectionality to the ‘post-identity politics era’. Intersectionality is conscious of poststructural paradigms of subjectivity while visioning a way for group politics. It is, as Nash defines, “a response to the lengthy history of essentialism”, and a way to come terms with “the legacy of exclusions of multiply marginalized subjects from feminist and anti-racist work” (Nash 2008, 3), but also from mainly white, middle-class queer theorizing.

Consequently, it is easy to notice that intersectionality recycles concepts such as ‘constructed’, ‘power structure’, ‘identity positions’, ‘knowledge-production’ etc. This kind of terminology reveals that intersectionality regards the phenomena it examines as cultural products. It urges us to address the contingent and relative nature of these phenomena and to connect them to specific ideologies and contexts. This implicates that intersectionality is *connected to the theoretical framework of Anglo-American Cultural Studies*.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, in its tendency to analyze how a certain context produces certain phenomena, for example, how Michelle Cliff’s novels emerge from the creolized Caribbean culture, intersectionality is a *contextual methodological tool* and a *culturally situated paradigm*. It is the particular circumstances and histories which organize and co-constitute several categorizations of identity in spatially contingent manner. Each cultural milieu has a history of its own within which the categorizations co-emerge. In a Caribbean reality, these compositions are indeed unique since its culture has already its foundations in the processes of creolization signifying several intermixings of languages, cultures, and ethnicities. As Carine M. Mardorossian explains, in the Caribbean race, for example, is not “a composite of European, African, or Asiatic solidarities”, but a figuration of “crossing whose patterns of meaning emerge only in light of the crossing of other categories such as class, gender, nationality, and sexuality” (Mardorossian 2005, 18). In my study, I will consider intersections represented by Cliff as situated intertwinings of identity categories and focus also on the historical contexts.

Epistemology is a branch philosophical thought which addresses the issues connected to knowing – its limits and possibilities as well as the questions concerning to the origins and formations of systems producing knowledge. Intersectionality focuses on gaining knowledge about the simultaneous effects of several hegemonic systems of power. A scholar who names his or her work as “intersectional” asks questions such as: How are our ways of thinking linked to ideas about race, gender, heteronormativity etc.? What kind of knowledge do hegemonic positions of identity produce and why? In what ways does this knowledge construct our subjec-

40 E.g. writers such as Patricia Hill Collins, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Hazel Carby, and the Combahee River Collective belonged to the group of those black feminists who issued the problems of multiple oppressions.

41 Both postcolonial and queer studies, as well as other emancipatory fields of theorizing, are widely applied in the Anglo-American academic context. However, French poststructuralism lies in the background of many of these perspectives. Foucauldian theories of discourse and power, Derridean deconstructions, French Feminists concerns of gender difference, and several other semiological approaches have contributed to these emancipatory theories. Thus, the stress on Anglo-American Cultural Studies might be too heavy, especially when a British School of Cultural Studies owns a lot to other than Anglo-American Marxist thinking. Maybe it would be more accurate to say that the case concerns Anglo-Afro-American applications of French poststructuralism.

tivities? This kind of interest in the limits and formations of (hegemonic) knowledge makes intersectionality as an *epistemological frame of research*. Moreover, like postcolonial studies intersectional research often has emancipatory objectives and political purposes. For example, a literary scholar studying postcolonial literature from an intersectional perspective keeps in mind the various, but often invisible, structures of oppression which can be read in novels, interpreted from cultural products or from socio-political practises. I would argue that intersectionality highlights the *objective of political emancipation*. As such, it is important to remember that much theorizing is connected to political liberatory movements in the background (e.g. the Gay Rights Movement, the Civil Rights Movement). Intersectionality did not arise in a vacuum but grew in debate with identity politics and several areas of so called “single axis” frameworks.<sup>42</sup>

Intersectional theorizing offers thus an ethical perspective in analyzing novels describing multiply marginalized subjects like the characters in Cliff’s writings. There are also some aspects in intersectionality that need to be addressed critically. I will now turn to four questions that I think remain as challenges of intersectionality. The first challenge is its inadequate methodological definitions; it is often used in a case-specific manner. As McCall notes “there has been little discussion of how to study intersectionality, that is, of its methodology” (McCall 2005, 1771). Some intersectional studies may be afflicted by the methodological simplicity making them mere lists of categories, which need to be pinpointed.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, it is problematic that intersectional studies tend to turn to black women as “prototypical intersectional subjects”, to use the words of Jennifer Nash, and that black women’s experiences are sometimes “reduced solely to marginalization” which ultimately romanticizes and idealizes positions of subordination (Nash 2008, 8). There is a danger that intersectionality once again monolithizes the experience of women of color while its original purpose was to challenge this tendency. As Nash points out, the question of “who is intersectional” remains unquestioned. She argues that “intersectional theory has obscured the question of whether all identities are intersectional or whether only multiply marginalized subjects have an intersectional identity (Nash 2008, 9-10). While I think that all identities are intersectional and realize that white, academic, Nordic, female literary scholar is an intersectional position, there remains shadows of ‘center versus margin’ –binarity

42 Without the political activism and personal courage of many individuals, there would be no such debates. Thus for me, it is important to stress that intersectionality leans on *political activism*. In the context of Michelle Cliff’s novels, respect for political activism is particularly important. She uses several historical figures as characters of her fictional worlds, many of which remain forgotten by “official historiography”. Fiction can thus be a tool for making visible the personal sacrifices and collective courage providing alternative archives for de-colonizing cultural memory.

43 Already in 1990 Judith Butler addressed these lists as “horizontal trajectory of adjectives” which strive to encompass a situated subject, but “invariably fail to be complete” (1999, 182). Butler names the sign “ect” as “embarrassed ect” at the end of the predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class etc. For her, it marks the exhaustion as well as the illimitable process of signification itself (182), but it also offers “a new departure for feminist political theorizing” (183). For more discussion about the “horizontal trajectory of adjectives” see Espinoza 1998. Dionne Espinoza discusses these “identity litanies” in the context of Judith Butler’s, Nancy Alarcón’s, Gloria Anzaldúa’s, and Diana Fuss’ works. Espinoza highlights that they “call to look at spaces within identity”, “challenge any fictional unity” of “whole categories”, and “advocate multiplicity” (Espinoza 1998, 54-5). For me, the intersectional view point is a salient tool for politicizing identity problematics. It provides a perspective for studying differences, even though the fictional coherence of identity must be presupposed for the purpose of emancipatory demands. It is the aspect of ethics included in emancipatory feminist work which supports the recognition of simultaneous differences, no matter how exhausting.

in the field of intersectionality as it is, more often than not, applied in literature considered “ethnic”. In the context of Cliff’s novels, it is however a viable tool in rethinking their ambivalent subjects hovering between positions of power and oppression.

The third challenge I want to identify, is the institutionalized language of analogy. This challenge is pinpointed by Anjali Arondekar in her study concerning queer postcolonialities. I agree with Arondekar in her demand that an analytical strategy “where the conjoining of the categories of queer and race within discourses of globalization needs to be rethought and rearticulated” (Arondekar 2005, 240). This remains a problem as long as the language of intersectionality converges different axis of identities as analogous categories. Arondekar criticizes “like race” –arguments which according to Arondekar e.g. gay and lesbian advocates have used in order to fight against anti-gay politics – that homophobia is like racism (Arondekar 2005, 248). These types of analogizations obscure the unique history and tradition of e.g. queer politics falsely universalizing the structures of identity. The scholars in the field of intersectional studies need to be cognizant of the inevitable differences between the analytical categories. Consequently, the forth challenge of intersectionality is connected to the question of the lived experience of the subjects of study. Does the poststructural academic theorization make a difference after the oppression has been addressed? Nash calls this as the “So what-question” of intersectionality (Nash 2008, 11). The objective of intersectionality is to acknowledge the particular and unique nature of reality, in which the multiply marginalized people live, silenced by the single-axis identity politics. Nash worries about this aim and underlines that “simply identifying particular intersections as undertheorized or unacknowledged is only the first step in a larger theoretical and political project [---]” (Nash 2008, 11). It may be that due to claims on uniqueness of lived experience intersectionality has drawn a lot from fiction, whether prose or poetry, of women of color. However, this identity poetics have remained widely unstudied in the context of intersectional theorizing. I argue that Michelle Cliff’s fiction has not yet been given enough recognition as early articulations of intersectionality albeit its visionary intertwining of ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexuality in a particular, creolized, cultural location.

### 1.3.1. Creole

In this sub-section, I will define my use of the concept *Creole*, which is significant both in Cliff’s novels and in my analysis. I will analyze how the Creole emerges as the site of intersectional identity processes in Cliff’s narratives. In this study, Creole is used as a vacillating signifier referring to culturally specific processes of Caribbean transculturation. Thus, Creole identity represented in Cliff’s novels is a particular identification connected to the Caribbean, which signifies, not only the movement and in-betweenness, but also ‘self at home’ within the islands. As a concept, Creole is intricate and complex, with a long history and many uses. Generally speaking, it has referred at least to three things: First to name the offspring of European parentage born in the Caribbean area, second a person with several ethnic heritages, or third a patois language.

Carolyn Allen suggests that if it is used as an adjective, it often refers to cultural movements, diasporic experiences, métissages, or hybrid backgrounds. If it is a noun, it means a language, a person, a style, or a culture: the Creole is a concept constantly changing from one context to another being less about essence than about relations (Allen 2002, 47-50).<sup>44</sup> I do agree with Carine M. Mardorossian who suggests that Caribbean literature with Creole characters forces us to develop “new reading strategies that emphasize not *whether* but *when* characters are ‘black’ or ‘white’” (Mardorossian 2005, 16). Maybe for these reasons postcolonial theorizing has often taken a particular interest in the creolized Caribbean cultures and literatures.

Creole can mean either whiteness or blackness depending on the context. It has sometimes been a racial term, sometimes a cultural term. However, it is connected to Caribbeanness whether in form of exile or locality.<sup>45</sup> As a concept, it combines sameness and difference: On the one hand, it includes the ties with European cultures, African cultures, and connects the many kinds of Caribbean experiences. On the other hand, there is the difference from e.g. the British heritage, African traditions, or something strictly local. Creole refers to something very particular arising from the loss of the particular, so to speak. Chris Bongie connects Creole to the ambivalence of the islands which form a figure that needs to be read more than in one way: “on the one hand, as absolutely particular [...] on the other, as a fragment, a part of some greater whole from which it is in exile” (Bongie 1998, 18). For example, in Jean Rhys’ novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Antoinette Cosway is a Creole, because she is white, but in Sam Selvon’s *Lonely Londoners* (1956) “the boys” are Creole because they are not. In theoretical terms, one could argue that “Creole” too, like identity, is a performative signifier of the logic of Derridean difference. However, in this study it is *a relation to home*, whether diasporic or hybrid, but a relation to Caribbeanness. I propose that in Michelle Cliff’s novels “the Creole” emerges as a new sense of home and identity processed simultaneously with intersecting feminist and queered contestations.

Nevertheless, the concept “Creole” is also imbued with many kinds of power relations. To conceptualize Creole strictly semiotically blurs the systems of hierarchies and oppressions it comprises. As Percy Hintzen notes, the discourse about Creole still includes shadows of

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44 Allen also notes that “Creole” is understood differently in UK and in Jamaica. In UK it often refers to someone “other” – e.g. a Jamaican. Instead, in Jamaica it refers to “a person of mixed race”. However, Allen emphasizes that “Creole” is understood differently in different parts of the Caribbean; Francophone Caribbean, Hispanic Caribbean, or in New Orleans. (See for definitions Allen 2002.) Edward Kamau Brathwaite has been a significant writer in developing the use of the term, particularly in his study *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (1971). However, his definitions have also aroused controversy, and they have been criticized for being too Afrocentric. Édouard Glissant promoted the idea of Creolité in his writings, and he has acted as a father figure for group of writers who emphasized that the Creole refers to a culture specific to the Caribbean area. Derek Walcott has also been a prominent figure in promoting the particular hybridisation of the Caribbean region. (See for etymology of Creole, Shepherd & Richards 2002, xi-xv.)

45 Allen encapsulates the uses of the term “Creole” in a list of seven points: First it is “a movement away from origin”, second “the inescapability of difference”, third historical experience rising from colonialism, fourth the consequence of “adaptation, accommodation, imitation, invention, fifth it is an indigenisation “marking the point of recognition of that new type belonging to the locale”, sixth “a dynamic process of interaction with new influences”, and finally seventh a “multiplicity of forms/types [...]” (Allen 2002, 56-7). See also for the definitions of “Creole” e.g. Davies 1994, 18-9; Bongie 1998, 7-23; Gouridine 2003, 13. Davies, for example, envisions its potential in unsettling several types of metanarratives, while Gouridine compares it to Bakhtin’s concept of “heteroglossic”.

colonial and capitalist systems of domination claiming that there is no such thing as a purely free Creole space (Hintzen 2002, *passim*). According to O. Nigel Bolland, Creole society needs to include an understanding of the class system in *Créolité*, as the society is a structure which serves the interests of the middle class and the intellectuals and which has ideals identifiable only by a particular social segment (Bolland 2002, 18).<sup>46</sup> He highlights the hierarchies hidden in the Creole society and cites Brathwaite as noting that plurality is acceptable “so far as it appears to remain divided into its old colonial alignments” (qtd. in Bolland 2002, 25). Hintzen, Bolland, and Rhonda Reddock all emphasize that the process of transculturation is never free from the other structures of power – patriarchy being one of them. Reddock reminds us that the gender system and sexual relations have been a site of creolization, and Bolland goes even further by stating that “Black women, whether slave or free, were often raped by white men. In other words, consideration of the ‘inter-cultural creolization’ process must take account of the often brutal realities of power” (Bolland 2002, 35; see also Reddock 2002).<sup>47</sup> Indeed, we must bear in mind that creolization is also a site of several conflicts; it is not solely a unifying concept celebrating differences.

*Creolization*, however, refers to a scene where Caribbean identities occur (Hinzen 2002, 92). It is a process of mixings and continuums carrying ideas about crossing the borders of ethnic divisions and racialized boundaries. Hinzen points out that Creolization also stands for a discursive space constituting a diasporic sense of solidarity (Hinzen 2002, 92).<sup>48</sup> I will follow these articulations about Creolization in analysing how Cliff’s narratives blur the colonial binaries into intermingling trajectories, and thus challenge essentialisms of identity politics. In this sense, my understanding of Creolization reminds of the conventional definitions of queer.

### 1.3.2. Queer

In Cliff’s novels the sexual identifications emerge in relation to ethnicity, race, social background, cultural locations, and local histories, and they are always experienced through these other axes of identity. In this subchapter I will first introduce the concept of “queer”, and then explain my emphasis on intersectional, located queer identities. Queer theory started gaining ground within humanities in the beginning of the 1990s. Queer theory aimed at challenging the binaries inherent in the earlier studies of sexuality, and critiqued essentialist ways on understand-

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46 Based on the interview with Meryl Schwartz I quoted above, Bolland’s definitions seem to be in accordance with Cliff’s own ideas of the term.

47 In a similar vein, Kathleen Gyssels considers Glissant’s ideas of commonly shared *Créolité* as patriarchal. It excludes the particularity of female experience and women’s reality. She analyzes Caribbean female writing from the point of view of *Feminist Créolité* reflecting how female authors re-write the creolized experience (Gyssels 2002, 51). Impressed by Gyssel’s ideas, I would like to insert Cliff’s novels, too, in the tradition of feminist *Créolité* in my study.

48 It is not adequate to claim that mere blurring the division between binaries such as Black/White, as Hinzen explains, could describe the complexity of creolization. It is important to acknowledge the significance of Asian-Caribbean and native-Caribbean interactions. I agree with Hinzen who emphasizes that the process of creolization challenges the forms of nationalism based on ethnic background (see Hinzen 2002, 100-3).



ding sexual identities – whether normative or non-normative. Since its beginning, a variety of studies applying the term ‘queer’ has become so wide, that references to a single queer theory are inadequate, one should refer to *Queer Studies*. In my study I will use intersectional queer studies as my methodological starting point.

During the 1980s scholars of gay and lesbian studies were caught in the midst of an ardent debate concerning the constructionist and essentialist ways of conceptualizing homosexual identities – conducted in the margins of wider similar identity debates. Queer theory begun to emerge at the turn of the decade in order to unite and to renew the field of sexual studies fragmented by these debates. Queer took notice of the recent feminist claims which offered a more constructivist view on gender and re-considered the premises of sexuality studies in order to break the limits of essentialism. As Lasse Kekki explains, “queer theory is founded on a politics of indeterminacy, and has often been described as a deconstruction of Gay and Lesbian Studies” (Kekki 2003, 44). Queer is used either as noun, verb, or adjective describing the anti-normative sexual positions without itself ever materializing in any particular positions (see Hall 2003, 12-5). Queer aims to resist heteronormativity which depends on binary propositions such as hetero/homo or man/woman. Moreover, the early queer theorists, such as Gayle Rubin<sup>49</sup>, emphasized the revisionist side of queer activism and -theory “by celebrating the ‘abnormal’” (Kekki 2003, 46). I consider queer as an epistemological shift in conceptualizing sexual agencies. It does not try to explain what or who the homosexual subject is, but to deconstruct the whole category by paying attention to contradictions in identity process.

Many scholars have tried to define the queer or the queering logic. Teresa de Lauretis was maybe the first theorist who used the word ‘queer’ to describe new ways of theorizing sexualities in the early Nineties. For de Lauretis, queer meant both the speculative work involved in discourse production and the deconstruction of the discourses of Gay and Lesbian Studies in order to reveal their constructed silences (de Lauretis 1991, iv). Ian Barnard argued that queer exceeds the binaries ‘gay/straight’ and ‘man/woman’ thus questioning the ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ as identity categories because of their nature as strictly gendered and oppositional to heterosexuality (Barnard 2004, 65). They were considered insufficient sites of exclusions. Barnard astutely observes that queer is very slippery to define: it often connotes a politicization of identity, and does not “depend on a binary opposite for its signifying power” (Barnard 2004, 65). This kind of depolarization of identities is most clearly present in Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*, which has a protagonist who is simultaneously male and female as well as being also both gay and straight. My understanding of queer refers to something which is inappropriate, questionable, other, and strange. Queer is relational and reactive without an essence of its own, but it participates in the processes of de-naturalizing the ‘obviousness’ of those identity categories, which appear ‘inevitable’ and ‘natural’. All the definitions of queer would therefore disrupt its potential to operate as an estranging catalyst. Thus, as Kekki claims, queer “examines

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49 Rubin does not name her sexual conceptualizations as “queer theory”, but she is often pronounced as the influential “pre-queer” scholar. See Kekki on early stages of queer theorizing, Kekki 2003, 44-53.



how issues connected to identity, sexuality, gender etc. are constructed and what it means that something is constructed the way it is" (Kekki 2003, 52) thereby implying that queer does not answer to the ontological questions about the nature of sexuality or sexual identities.

Queer studies has also been a site of criticism. It has been taken as an elitist epistemology based on academic discourses, which once again undermines the efforts of gay and lesbian group politics, thereby disposing of the collective solidarity. By insisting on discourses, texts and semiotics, it was accused of blurring the bodily nature of actual sexual acts. Furthermore, some lesbian feminist groups have been hesitant towards the "non-gendered" queer, because these "gender-neutral" terms tend to represent the male experiences. On the one hand, it has been suspected that once again queer is the effort to recruit women into male battles and on the other hand it has been considered a new closet for lesbians and gay men in its claims to lose the specificities of those terms.<sup>50</sup> Queer has also been harshly criticised by Elizabeth Grosz who sees it as a risky political category open to heterosexual deviants such as "sadists, pederasts, fetishists [--- and] pimps" to accommodate the Lesbian and Gay political advances to their own rationale (Grosz 1995, 249-50). I, however, deem queer less a category than an epistemological challenge in considering sexualities. This study applies queer as a reading strategy, which means that I am to interpret the epistemological edges of naturalized sexual categories confronted in Cliff's writings.<sup>51</sup> In applying Susan Bordo's definitions David Bell and Gill Valentine consider queer reading as "daring epistemological guerrilla warfare" which is an act of "intervention, contestation, resistance, subversion, interrogation" (Bell & Valentine 1995, 15). Consequently, I will explore "the guerrilla strategies" of Cliff's textual rebellion. My aim is to look a bit aside of both, postcolonial and queer modes of theorizing, in order to create new intersectional interpretations.<sup>52</sup>

Intersectional queer theorists examine the ways in which several other institutions participate in forming sexual identities. The main question is no longer focused on sexual poli-

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50 Linda Garber provides a criticism of queer theory from the point of view of working class lesbian feminism of color in her study *Identity Poetics: Race, Class, and the Lesbian-Feminist Roots of Queer Theory* (2001). I will consider this critique in more detail in chapter 6.1. See for more on critiques Jagose 1996, 101-126.

51 By a queer reading strategy I mean deconstructive reading which aims to challenge the seemingly obvious or naturalized categorizations concerning the gender and sexuality. I agree with Donald E. Hall who states that "queering" does pose a particular threat to the systems of classification that assert their timelessness and fixity, [---] torturing their lines of demarcation, pressuring their easy designations" (Hall 2003, 14). Lasse Kekki also suggests that the reader who is applying queer reading strategy "can recognize the gay/hetero distinction not only in explicitly gay or lesbian texts but in almost all texts; this enables him or her to *acknowledge the importance of this distinction and its power to define Western culture*" (Kekki 2003, 67). I follow Kekki in his notion of the importance of homo/hetero distinction in Western culture, and my queer reading strategy aims to render visible the operations of this distinction in Cliff's fiction. See more for the queer reading strategy Kekki 2003, 66-9.

52 Some scholars argue that it is problematic to apply Anglo-American theories to consider Caribbean sexual politics. Yet, the research considering Caribbean minority sexualities is still scarce. However, intersectional theorizations about race and ethnicity, mainly written in the U.S. academic circles, are recently published in large numbers. Are these studies then applicable to the unique Caribbean context? A British based caribbeanist, Tracy Skelton argues that Anglo-American studies can be applied to Caribbean and in particular Jamaican context. She notes that "Jamaica is the Caribbean island most influenced by political and cultural debates within the United States. [---]. I argue that there is enough similarity between the socio-cultural, sexual-political contexts of Jamaican and African-American society that the aforementioned intellectual debates can be utilised [---]" (Skelton 1995, 268). I agree with Skelton in the case of Michelle Cliff, who has lived in USA for a long time and participated in Anglo-American scholarly debates.

tics *per se*, but on seeing a complicated assemblage of social structures which are all imbued with sexual politics. Intersectional queer theorizing examines, for example, how the empirical logic within which the racial categories were created is also at the core of sexual classifications. Cliff too depicts the systems which racialize sexual “deviances” and vice versa, and her works render visible the connections between heteronormativity, colonialism, and white patriarchy. *Her novels set the queer as a site of postcolonial agency and as a perspective out of which the colonized history can be re-written.* Her works do not aim to separate queered identities from African Caribbean discourses, but rather include them as viable factors within the creolized tradition. Therefore, as I now turn to my attention Cliff’s novels, the heavy methodological tool box introduced above will, indeed, be needed.

## 2. Fiction or History

In this chapter my aim is to explore the ways in which Cliff's novels destabilize colonial historiography while introducing the three novels in more detail. I argue that these novels are trying to imagine such a past for a Caribbean woman, which she could feel as her own and which enables her voice to be heard. The feminist historian, Joan Scott, writes in her essay "Experience" (1992) that identities are attached to the historical processes shaping the experiences which produce identities. Scott explains that we need to "attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences" (Scott 1992, 25). For Scott, experiences are not so much individual as they are connected to the knowledge production constituting the subject. She writes that "to think about experience in this way is to historicize it as well as to historicize the identities it produces" (Scott 1992, 26; see also MacDonald-Smythe 2002, 12).<sup>53</sup> Scott argues that feminist historiography uncovers the hegemonic (patriarchal) structures of so-called "normal history" by posing new questions to texts that shape our historical understanding. She concludes that women's history does not simply add women's experiences to traditional history, but radically reconceptualizes the past differently (see Scott 1991). I will examine Cliff's novels in the context of feminist political re-writings of history.

I argue that the knowledge producing colonial identities are deconstructed and reversed in Cliff's fiction, so to say, 'against the master's purposes'. Her narratives disturb and destabilize the colonial 'facts', legitimized as historical, concerning the Caribbean. Those 'facts' are confronted with her 'textual rebellion' of fiction. Cliff's narratives use the technique of confronting history with alternative stories, which makes the factual nature of the legitimized story appear as construction – validated by the authoritarian discourse. My aim is to examine how

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53 Antonia MacDonald-Smythe's book *Making Homes in the West/Indies* (2001) includes these quotations. Her book ushered me towards Scott's work. I am indebted to her work in this matter.

her characters are able to break the pressure of “nightmarish history”<sup>54</sup> and how they create new, creolized versions of it. I will argue that Cliff’s novels have a *contrapuntal relationship to history*, to apply Edward Said’s terms (Said 1993, 59).

The idea that “narrative structures and ontological assumptions prefigure all historical works” (Kramer 1989, 108) provides a background for narrative understandings of historiography.<sup>55</sup> By using literary theoretical methodology, we may analyse those contingent, epistemological frameworks and narrative conventions on which the historian relies. Therefore, I will argue that by contributing to knowledge production, many postcolonial novels, including those by Cliff, participate in shaping the contexts and the epistemological frameworks within which the historiographical material becomes interpreted. Literary works are also included in the context of historiographical processes. For Hayden White, historical knowledge is always a representation, and history cannot be written without narrativity. However, narrativity too, relies on ideological practises: events, meanings, and values are narrated through perspectives which presuppose the writing process (see White 2003, 30). According to White, modern literature has the potential to change and challenge the surrounding narrative presuppositions. He explains:

It is literature’s claim to manifest, express, or represent reality, to summon up and interrogate the real world in all its complexity and opacity, that brings it into conflict with writers of historical discourse. This conflict is usually conceived as a battle between fact and fiction or between rational argumentation and imaginative presentation. But it is a feature of [modernist] literary writing that it brings under question the fact-fiction distinction and, along with that, the distinction between the real and the imaginary. (White 2005, 32-3.)

In this sense it can be argued that postcolonial literature participates in the re-writing process of formerly colonized sense of history.

I will suggest that the narratives of the past, as acts of postcolonial remembering and resistant forms of story-telling, become a place of refuge for the oppressed in Cliff’s writing. The past has spatial dimensions in a concrete manner in *Free Enterprise* as the people in a leper colony depicted in the novel, tell each other stories about either their private histories, the collective histories of their people, or the memories of communal traditions they can remember. As they are locked up in a colony they conduct these “memory-tellings” in order to feel at home again, to gain the sense of belonging. I will take this kind of a process of *locating the collective memory* as my hypothesis while carrying on to the analysis of Cliff’s novels. I claim that her characters can reconstruct their cultural identities only when they are able to fasten themselves to the Caribbean past. Re-interpretations of colonial and patriarchal history are an integral part of the process through which female agency can be found.

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54 Derek Walcott follows the expression of James Joyce, and uses the term “nightmare of history” to criticize the authority of one single version on history. Walcott writes that the “self-torture arises when the poet also sees history as language, when he limits his memory to suffering of the victim” (Walcott 1995, 371).

55 In this context Kramer focuses on White and LaCapra.

## 2.1. *Abeng*: From Male History to Female Archaeology

Michelle Cliff's first novel *Abeng* (1984) tells the story of a light-skinned Creole girl, Clare Savage, and her Jamaican adolescence. The novel is a kind of a fragmentary *Bildung* story, describing 12-year-old Clare's growing insights into the sometimes harsh realities of Jamaican culture. Her quest is to develop her own sense of identity in a reality divided by (post)colonial borders. Noraida Agosto describes the subject of *Abeng* as a fragmented self who is "striving for coherence, whereas in *No Telephone to Heaven* the subject embraces multiplicity by assuming identities excluded by the dominant system" (Agosto 1999, 103). I suggest that *Abeng* is a narrative of Clare's early observations of a number of boundaries, whether cultural, racial, or gendered, present in her life. She learns how these boundaries shape her and others, and in the end she realizes that her quest is to "define" or "find" herself in between the boundaries. *Abeng* does not offer a solution to Clare's identity quest – that is left to the bitter end of *No Telephone to Heaven*, the sequel to *Abeng*.

In the beginning of *Abeng*, Clare feels herself divided by her quarrelsome parents. Her father Boy Savage, whose ethnic background is unclear but who thinks of himself as white, is a drunkard and a gambler. He boasts to his daughter about the forefather of the Savage family, Judge Savage, who owned a plantation and several slaves. It is told that at the dawn of abolition Judge Savage took the law into his own hands and burned all his slaves in their cabins. Boy is bitter about the loss of his family's plantation and other fortunes, and makes it his duty to transmit to Clare the proud family saga of the Savages alongside the grandeur of European history. As the narrator of *Abeng* explains: "It did not occur to Clare to question her father's history" (A, 10). The main story-line of *Abeng* describes how Clare gradually learns that there are also several other ways to tell Jamaican history. Clare's deeper understanding begins to develop as she starts asking Boy questions about the Holocaust and the history of the Jews. He merely silences the questions with vague circular reasoning. Clare becomes obsessed with her attempts to understand Jewish history. She reads the *Diary of Anne Frank* and starts writing a diary herself. The narrator explicates Clare's obsession with the Holocaust as a part of her own quest: "She was reaching, without knowing it, for an explanation of her own life" (A, 72).<sup>56</sup>

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56 According to Faith Smith the complex relation between Clare and Boy Savage is a metaphor, typical of Caribbean literature, about the relationship between a white man and a woman of color in Jamaica (Smith 1999, 167).

Clare's mother is the daughter of a black peasant woman, Kitty Freeman<sup>57</sup>, who has involuntarily married Boy. Kitty loves her native country and shares compassion with its people, despising her husband's admiration of bourgeois and white ways of living. Her family responsibilities have required that she gives up her dream to be a school teacher somewhere in rural Jamaica. Kitty tries to compensate for this loss by helping the poor in the country-side financially. In addition, she loves the forests and the rivers of her country and remembers African songs and old enchantments. Kitty knows the healing powers of many herbs and plants as well as is able to carry on ancient rites and traditional beliefs. Clare appears to the reader as being caught between these two ways of living: white patriarchal and native matriarchal. She cannot position herself in either way, and is unable to define her relationship to her home-country. Clare cannot go beyond the ambivalent nature of her status as a Creole girl who is able to pass as white. The narrator explains:

She was both dark and light. Pale and deeply colored. To whom should she turn if she needed assistance? From whom would she expect it? Her mother or her father – it came down to that sometimes. Would her alliances shift at any given time.

The black or the white? A choice would be expected of her, she thought. (A, 36-7.)

Clare's further *Bildung* relies on finding a space between her parents' views which is not limited to either of these two possibilities. Moreover, the ambivalent situation of the protagonist is often juxtaposed against the Jamaican cultural reality as depicted in the novel. As Clare begins to realize the ambivalent sides of her country too, she becomes conscious of her quest. She needs to find a way to structure the past, her own as well as that of Jamaica, in a way that the future could be open to her. She cannot live like her parents:

Both Boy and Kitty were locked in the past – separate pasts to be sure, but each clung to something back there. For Boy it was Cambridge University and sugar plantations and a lost fortune. For Kitty it was what had been done to her people when they were slaves. (A, 128.)

Clare cannot cling to either of these separate pasts. Her challenge is to relate to the both sides of her heritage and find a new way of being that incorporates them both.

The narrator's voice dominates *Abeng*. The narrator becomes a teacher of Caribbean history as well as the bearer of a hidden heritage. The narration shifts between the sections

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57 The names of the characters are important metaphors in the novel. They are subversive iterations of colonial stereotypes: On the one hand, Clare's mother, who has committed herself to slave history, is called Freeman. Freeman also refers to Clare's own search for decolonial identity which in the end is bound to her ability to re-commit herself into her maternal heritage. Boy Savage, on the other hand, refers to his colonized masculinity. The name (a boy and a savage) parodies his desire to assimilate into British values. "Boy" refers to the relationship of master and slave defining the slaves as inferior (see Alexander 2001, 149). Clare Savage refers to her ambivalent cultural position. She is a light-skinned (clare) Creole who identifies herself with her African heritage (savage). See for more on names in Michelle Cliff's fiction Raiskin 1996, 183-4; Raiskin 1994b, 164; Cliff 1990, 265; Edmondson 1993, 184. Sika Dagbovie adds that Clare's name recalls "one of her vexed literary predecessors" of "mulatta tradition" Clare Kendry in Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) (Dagbovie 2006, 99).

of Clare's story narrated from her point of view and that of Jamaican history narrated from the point of view of the omniscient narrator. These shifts emphasize the parallels between her personal ambivalence and the collective ambivalence of Jamaican nation-building. The narrator, for example explains, how a Jamaican sense of history is colonized:

In school they were told that their ancestors had been pagan. That there had been slaves in Africa, where Black people had put each other in chains. They were given the impression that the whites who brought them here from Gold Coast were only copying a West African custom. As though the whites had not named the Slave Coast themselves. (A, 18.)

The past may be seen through ideological frames, it may be romanticised or manipulated. As the narrator of *Abeng* later explains: "A [Jamaican] sense of history was lost in a romance" (A, 30). Even though *Abeng* is often interpreted to be somewhat autobiographical reflecting Cliff's own story, it is more than that, it also becomes an *autoethnography*.<sup>58</sup>

In *Abeng*, the narrator appears to be an instructor who tells the reader what the characters know and what they have been taught but also what they do not know or what knowledge is there to be known for those who see through the colonial system. This narrative logic once again highlights the dialectics of story and counter-story in Cliff's fiction. It is the narrator's memory which disturbs the legitimate history:

They [the townsmen sitting in the Tabernacle] did not know about the Kingdom of Ashanti or the Kingdom of Dahomey, where most of their ancestors had come from. They did not imagine that Black Africans had commanded thousands of warriors. Built universities. Created systems of law. Devised language. Wrote history. Poetry. Were traders. Artists. Diplomats. (A, 20.)

The narrator fills in blank spots of the colonized sense of history with her own "archeological" version of the past. As William Tell Gifford explains, the hidden history only accessed by the narrator in *Abeng* is to become a de-colonizing awareness in *No Telephone to Heaven* (Gifford 2003, 63). This "other history" is that of a Caribbean female of color.

The other history, the one explained by the narrator, seems to be more archeological than archival in *Abeng*. The Caribbean past is to be excavated from the earth, read from the shells, or quarried from the rock. In the novel the unwritten archeological past comes to the surface as little pieces of memory are collected. This past is an archeological "history of rock and shell" as Barbara Edlmair calls it (see Edlmair 1999, 33-4). This is highlighted even in the title: *abeng* is a horn or an instrument made out of conch shell. An *Abeng*, which becomes a

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58 See for more on Clare Savage's character as a national allegory e.g. Lima 1993, 35. *Abeng* is not an autobiography per se, even though it has loose connections to Cliff's own life. The author herself says that Clare Savage "is not exactly an autobiographical character, but she is an amalgam of myself" (Cliff 1990b, 264). Françoise Lionnet has analyzed *Abeng* as an autobiography and comes to the conclusion that it might be called both "*a postcolonial autobiography*" and "*an autoethnography*", where the attention is turned towards a more collective sense of identity (Lionnet 1992a, 321-3 and 334). Karen Caplan, instead, names *Abeng* as a *cultural autobiography* (Caplan 1992, 130-2), whereas Opal Palmer Adisa calls it a "*semi-autobiographical novel*" (1994, 273). However, the characteristic that combines these kinds of new understandings of the autobiographical genre is an attempt to deconstruct the individual (male) subjectivity and move towards a larger dialogue between public and private histories.

leitmotif of the novel, had two historical uses in Jamaica. It was used by the slave-owners to gather their slaves, but it was also used by the marooned slaves, the run-away slaves living in the bush to secretly communicate with each other. The two sounds of an abeng are present in the narration.<sup>59</sup> The novel begins with the following words:

The island rose and sank. Twice. During periods in which history was recorded by indentations on rock and shell. This is a book about the time which followed on that time. As the island became a place where people lived. Indians. Africans. Europeans. (A, 3.)

The narrator explains here that Jamaican history does not begin with the arrival of Columbus. She turns to pre-Colombian era to destabilize the written version by looking after the traces of archeological history in nature.<sup>60</sup> For example, the caves and crevasses in the Cockpit Country, a terrain extremely hard to reach, “created when the island sank during the Pliocene Period” (A, 21), is a site where Marooned slaves were hidden and from where they continued their resistance. These “endless funnels in the earth” (A, 21) are pre-colonial archives out of which the pieces of Jamaican history can be gathered, and re-known in the form of emancipatory consciousness.

The narrator describes a reality which is clearly layered in many ways, and the archeological past is covered with written history. By detaching these layers the narrator practices her textual rebellion. The violence of the authoritarian discourse becomes clear as the archeological sites of the counter-discourse are revealed. This mechanism is clear, for instance, when the narrator describes a drive to the Caymana’s Racetrack, a place where Boy gambles: “The turn for Caymanas was on the Spanish Town Road, right by Tom Cringle’s Cotton Tree, a huge silk cotton tree which was a Jamaican landmark, from whose branches human bodies had once swung” (A, 144). The narrator acts as a textual archeologist, who points out ‘the gullies’ within historical discourse out of which the other kind of past can be detected. Sometimes this archeology is more concrete. As the Anglican Church is renovated in Kingston, the working men also dig up something else:

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59 On the first page of *Abeng*, before the novel begins, the narrator explains to the reader: “Abeng is an African word meaning conch shell. The blowing of the conch called the slaves to the canefields in the West Indies. The abeng also had another use: it was the instrument used by the Maroon armies to pass their messages and reach one another.” This is the information the reader has when she begins the actual novel. “Abeng” symbolizes its dialectics between the discourse and the counter-discourse. According to Simon Gikandi it becomes both a metaphor of displacement and resistance. He writes that it is “a sign of both the narrator’s connection to her previously repressed African past and her functional distance from it; it is a symbolic representation of the process of historical remembering and disremembering” (Gikandi 1992, 237).

60 See for more on the narrator’s relationship towards the past and the beginning of the novel Edlmair 1999, and Gifford 2003, 65-9.



The Parish Church was High Anglican – it was the church of attendance of the white governor, and members of the royal family stopped there when the queen's yacht, H.M.S Britannica, docked in Kingston harbour. [---]. In 1958, while digging near the churchyard during some renovations to the building, workers uncovered a coffin of heavy metal – a coffin of huge proportions. [---]. A brass plate which had been affixed to the coffin and etched with an inscription informed the vicar that the coffin contained the remains of a hundred plague victims, part of a shipload of slaves from the Gold Coast, who contracted the plague from rats on the vessel which brought them to Jamaica. (A, 7.)

The counter-history in *Abeng* is deeply attached to the Jamaican ground and to the sufferings of slaves. The decolonizing memory is hidden in the bowels of the earth or scattered in fragments to be found from rocks, trees, old songs, ancient rites, or secrets remembered by women. However, one should not forget that the dialogue of histories is not free of hierarchies. For example, the narrator describes a Jamaican coin to the reader. On the coin, there is one word of the Arawak-language, JAMAICA, side by side with a British coat of arms. The narrator explains: "An Arawak and a white conqueror: only one of these existed in 1958" (A, 5). As Simon Gikandi notes, "the colonizer's cultural text is represented and dispersed at the same time; it is shown to have achieved coherence or totality at the expense of the other, who now exists only as a sign with no referent" (Gikandi 1992, 241). Cliff's narration exposes plural meanings not only in historical discourse but also in nature, objects, and language.

The counter-history in *Abeng* is not only archeological, but also feminist. The female-, and, particularly, mother-characters are important transmitters and mediators of Caribbean history. As Jennifer Thorington Springer explains, Cliff's representations are such (re)configurations of history which challenge an "androcentric reading of Caribbean history" (Thorington Springer 2007, 46). Yet, the matrifocal readings are dominated by the narrator's voice, while Clare's sense of history is often trampled by the patriarchal version. Her internal ambivalence and fragmentary identity are culminated in the absence of the matrilinear connection as Kitty thinks that Clare is a "father's girl", because of her "golden" skin. Thus, it is merely natural that Clare is "handed over to Boy the day she was born" (A, 128).<sup>61</sup> For Kitty it is self-evident that Clare is sent to live with "a narrow-minded white lady" because she, Kitty says, "can teach you to take advantage of who you are, [---] I can't do that for you" (A, 150). Thus Clare lacks true maternal bonds and, later in *No Telephone to Heaven*, she must re-build her relationship to her maternal heritage.<sup>62</sup> It is the narrator who tells the reader what Kitty cannot tell her daughter. It is the narrator who explains things Clare does not know, not her mother. For instance, when visiting Judge's old house Clare notices the rectangles, the remains of the slave cabins

61 For more on the theme of parentage and skin-color in *Abeng* see Dagbovie 2006, 94-98.

62 Simon Gikandi analyses widely the configurations of history in *Abeng*. He argues that the significance of history in Cliff's narration is not posited on teleology but on discontinuity – ruptures and interruptions. Colonial history contrasts the "spoken history of the African subaltern in the Caribbean." Moreover, this spoken history and the recovery of patois "is the precondition" for "the New World female presence" in *Abeng* (Gikandi 1992, 234-5). Gikandi's analysis on history and representation in *Abeng*, published more than fifteen years ago, is still valid and widely read. For more on the female presence and Cliff's rewriting of history in *Abeng*: see e.g. Agosto 1999, Chassot 2009, Cliff 2003, Edlmair 1999, Edmondson 1993, Ilmonen 2004, MacDonald-Smythe 2001, Raiskin 1996, Thorington Springer 2007.

Judge has burned down. The narrator comments that “Clare saw that afternoon behind the great house rectangles remembering an event she would never know of” (A, 40). Slave history, felt so acutely by Kitty, is lost to Clare without her mother’s guidance.<sup>63</sup> In this sense, Cliff’s narrative dichotomy between the feminist archeological past and patriarchal/colonial written history actually renews the much criticized (post)colonialist binary paradigms.<sup>64</sup> However, as I will argue later, this dichotomy is made much more fluctuating in *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Free Enterprise*.

Alongside Miss Mattie, one of the most central symbols of feminist counter-history in *Abeng*, is a mythical female warrior Nanny. Nanny’s legend appears in all the novels by Cliff. Nanny is one of the historical characters of the novel, known to have been a leader of the Jamaican Maroon guerillas during the early eighteenth century. Today Nanny is one of the Jamaican National Heroes, yet still unknown to European historiography.<sup>65</sup> Maroon-warriors consisted mainly of runaway-slaves who founded their own communities to the nearly inaccessible terrains of inland Jamaica, called Cockpit County. The Maroons were successful in fighting the British troops, and the British were never able to conquer the areas of Maroons. Thus, the British colonial rule was forced to sign bilateral treaties with Maroons.<sup>66</sup> In *Abeng*, Nanny is on many occasions juxtaposed with the colonial queens, Victoria and Elizabeth II. The narrator uses Maroon-narratives and stories about Nanny to distract the more linear narration of Clare’s

63 This is the explanation why Gikandi names the narration of *Abeng* as “schizophrenic” text shifting between several layers of history (Gikandi 1992, 235). This narrative technique simultaneously highlights the fragmented consciousness of Clare. Clare’s problem is that she is unable to combine the pieces of African Caribbean history into the colonial version taught in school. As Gikandi notes: “Clare does not know how to master historical discourse [---]. In other words, she cannot combine her meanings to reconstruct the whole” (Gikandi 1992, 244). Thus, Clare’s relationship to the past remains “schizophrenic” constructing her subjectivity towards a fragmented, plural consciousness.

64 The dichotomy arises from the early eighties identity political standpoint feminism illustrating Cliff’s close connections also to the non-Caribbean, Anglo-American debates on identity.

65 See the official website of the Jamaica Government [http://www.jis.gov.jm/special\\_sections/Heroes/Heroes1.htm#Nanny](http://www.jis.gov.jm/special_sections/Heroes/Heroes1.htm#Nanny). In 1975 the government declared her as Queen Nanny the National Heroine.

66 The term “Maroon-warrior” refers to Jamaican guerrillas. The warfare of the Maroons was effective. It was based on complicated strategies: hiding, traps, knowledge of the surrounding terrains, and efficient scouting. Maroon warriors developed a secret method of communication using “talking drums”, abengs, and a Creole patois based on the west-African Akan-language. Maroon communities were hidden, isolated from society and thus preserved a rich tradition including folk wisdom, language, dance, rhythm, ways of communication, and particularly, the practises of healing. E.g. the novel by Marie Elena John, *Unburnable* (2006), is based on the idea that one of these hidden Maroon communities could still exist in the island of Dominica. The two main Maroon tribes in eighteenth century Jamaica were Leeward Maroons lead by Cudjoe (who is also present in Cliff’s fiction) and Windward Maroons lead by Nanny. Both groups were strictly organized. It is known that Cudjoe signed a treaty with British in 1739. In this treaty the freedom of the Maroons were guaranteed. However, Maroons also have an ambivalent position in pre-emancipation rebellions. Their bilateral treaties with British also made them agents of the colonial rule as they promised to return runaway slaves and to help to put down slave rebellions (for example in 1865 in Morant Bay Rebellions) in exchange for their own freedom.

Nonetheless, Nanny’s (also Granny Nanny, Queen Nanny) significance is extraordinary in Jamaican culture. According to the official website of the Government of Jamaica she is “a symbol of unity and strength for her people during times of crisis”. Still today descendants of Maroons live largely separate from Jamaican culture in their largest town Accompong. Their culture has preserved its original label. Some scholars think that e.g. the West-African healing tradition *Myal* has been preserved in Maroon areas. The word “maroon” is often traced in the Spanish word “cimarrón” (wild). See for Jamaican Maroons Senior 2003, 306-9, Edlmair 1999, 36-8, and from the point of view Maroon narratives preserved among contemporary Maroon communities Bilby 2005.

story.<sup>67</sup> As Barbara Edlmair explains “for Cliff she [Nanny] becomes a female corrective in a history of male revolutionaries” (Edlmair 1999, 37-8.) Nanny’s mythical abilities in the areas of hunting and healing, as well as her intimate relationship to Jamaican nature are highlighted in Cliff’s narration. She becomes an allegory of protection and nurturing, as well as resistance and survival. Nanny’s role in Cliff’s fiction radically destabilizes the myths of Maroons as icons of masculine ethos of warfare. Patricia Krus, for one, emphasizes that in earlier Caribbean fiction Maroons have been symbols of strong masculinity (Krus 2002, 42).<sup>68</sup> Cliff’s highlighting of Nanny’s character represents her narrative attempts to create new feminist counter-history.

The narrator of *Abeng* describes Nanny as a mythical figure “who could catch a bullet between her buttocks and render the bullet harmless” (A, 14), thus playing down the weapons of the enemy. Moreover, she claims that Nanny was a “small and old Black woman whose only decoration was a necklace fashioned from the teeth of white men” (A, 21), and she “spins her Akan chants into spells which stun her enemies. Calls on the goddesses of the Ashanti forests” (A, 19). In *Abeng* the stories about Nanny function as archaeological dissonances fragmenting the linear narration. The dissonances that Edlmair names as “fragmentation, silence, and repression” in Cliff’s fiction are for her “not only a problem to be overcome” but also a “condition of possibility [---] in which an identity is created out of the chaotic colonial and postcolonial history” (Edlmair 1999, 47). Narrative dissonances participate in the process of building a “projective past”, as Homi K. Bhabha calls the version of history altered by the postcolonial “retroactivity”. The projective past for Bhabha is a “historical narrative of alterity” that explores political identities, hybridities, social contradictions, and transvalues cultural differences. (Bhabha 1995, 252.) I suggest that the narration of *Abeng*, which alternates between Marooned metaphors, archaeological time, colonial history, and post-independent Jamaica is, in Bhabha’s terms, a practise of projective past creating a postcolonial “retroactivity”.

From an intersectional point of view, Clare’s struggle between privileges and limitations is also connected to the questions of class and gender. As far as skin-color and class are concerned, she is privileged, but in terms of gender, restricted. It is hard for Clare to understand the advantages she has gained simply by being born into a middle-class, well-to-do family. Clare goes to a school for girls in town and spends her vacations at her grandmother’s, Miss Mattie’s, farm. During these holiday-seasons at Miss Mattie’s, her best friend is Zoe, the daughter of a poor marketwoman who lives on Miss Mattie’s land. The question of class culminates in the friendship between Clare and Zoe in *Abeng*. Clare recognizes neither the ways she can use power over Zoe nor the effects of Miss Mattie’s position as a land-owner. She does not understand Zoe’s meaning as Zoe explains:

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67 Interestingly enough, Barbara Lalla reminds that the theme of marronage in Jamaican literature is curiously connected to a “concern for retrieving children” who have escaped (Lalla 1996, 179). It might be interpreted that echoes of this connection is also present in *Abeng*.

68 For more on the metaphors of Maroons in Caribbean literature see Krus 2002, 40-8.

Wunna<sup>69</sup> is town gal, wunna papa is buckra. Wunna talk buckra. Wunna leave here when wunna people come for wunna. Smaddy? Wunna is smaddy already. Gal smaddy. Kingston smaddy. Dis place no matter a wunna a-tall, a-tall. Dis here is fe me territory. Kingston a fe wunna. Me will be here so all me life – me will be marketwoman like fe me mama. Me will have fe beg land fe me and fe me pickney to live upon. Wunna will fo a England, den maybe America, to university, and when we meet later we will be different smaddy. But we is different smaddy now. (A, 118.)

Clare gets confused after hearing Zoe's words. The narrator explains her feelings:

She [Clare] did not realize that it was only she who moved across the lines of ownership – because she was Kitty's daughter and Miss Mattie's granddaughter. And Zoe, her darker friend, her friend whose mother was a marketwoman, was only allowed along. How was it with Zoe when Clare was not around – Clare did not know because they had not spoken of it. (A, 121.)

Slowly Clare begins to anticipate that her golden skin, green eyes, and “wavy chestnut hair” (A, 61) are connected to her status within the local social hierarchy. As Caroline Rody notes, she can embody history, but she does not know it (Rody 2001, 161). It takes Clare time to realize why she must always greet Miss Mattie's friends in her parlor letting them comment on “her prospects, and how blessed Miss Mattie is to get herself such a granddaughter” (A, 61).

Cliff herself has explained the intertwining of race and class in Jamaica in her interview with Meryl Schwartz: “The class system is founded on race, but Clare would not make a racist assumption about Zoe [...] [though] she would certainly make classist assumptions about Zoe and herself” (Schwartz 1993, 616).<sup>70</sup> Sika Alaine Dagbovie analyzes insightfully the classist effects described in *Abeng* (see Dagbovie 2006, 99–100). According to her, Clare's racial passing also has class implications. These are rendered visible in the section where a poor, dark skinned woman asks time from Clare's classmates “darker than Clare” (A, 77 qtd. in Dagbovie 2006, 99) and becomes rejected by them. As the classmates turn away from the woman Clare is shocked about their behaviour. Dagbovie explains that “Cliff demonstrates how race, class and gender prejudices culminate” resulting in discrimination “against an elderly, black Jamaican woman (Dagbovie 2006, 99). Dagbovie concludes that Clare is not ready to understand why the lady approaches her classmates not her and, as someone who has been “sheltered from the damage of race and class prejudices”, cannot comprehend their rejection. However, Clare's attention to and compassion for this woman echoes “her desire to align herself with a history that she shares with a woman” (Dagbovie 2006, 100). It remains her challenge to detect and to acknowledge this history.

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69 Wunna=you, smaddy=somebody, buckra=white, pickney=children.

70 Jennifer Thorington Springer considers it problematic that the narrator does not hold Clare accountable for her internalized racism by making disclaimers such as “Clare did not analyze; she observed” (Thorington Springer 2007, 52). I would argue that racism intertwined with class is strongly stated in Cliff's fiction. While Clare might be more of an observer in *Abeng*, her further “Bildung”, described in *No Telephone to Heaven*, includes the painful awareness of the Jamaican system of intersecting race and class.

Class certainly is an agent also in Miss Mattie's action. Even though she aids her neighbours and allows them to live on her land, she claims a position of authority based on economics. As Agosto, one of Cliff's critics, articulates: "Although Miss Mattie cut cane at the age of ten and was whipped by the overseer, once she becomes a landowner, she forgets her poor origins and draws a color and class line" [---] (Agosto 1999, 107). Miss Mattie does not allow Clare to give her new bathsuit to Zoe to try on (A, 101), and the neighbors who live on her land have to go to the backdoor and wait for her to appear if they want to talk to her (A, 121-2).<sup>71</sup> Miss Mattie's change highlights that identity positions remain socially constructed, even contradictory. In a certain context a rural woman of color may also occupy an oppressive position.

Clare's skin-color embodies the colonial hierarchies and becomes a site of both hybridity and creolization in the novel therefore appearing as a political signifier. It can be thought as a surface open to multiple readings, to apply the strategy Jackie Stacey and Sara Ahmed theorize in their study *Thinking through the Skin* (2001). The skin is made intelligible in several discourses. As it is culturally changing, it is also a contingent signifier. In the introduction Stacey and Ahmed explain the feminist concern with revaluing the body that has lead to an acknowledgement that "bodies are not simply given (as 'nature'), that bodies are differentiated and that subjectivity and identity cannot be separated from specific forms of embodiment" meaning that bodies cannot be transcended (Ahmed & Stacey 2001, 3). Clare's relationship to Zoe reveals the politics of skin: its lighter color signifies social success. Clare's sense of ambivalence, however, reveals that her cultural position is not aligned with her emotional ties to African Caribbean heritage. As Dagbovie explains, standing pretty as a doll in Miss Mattie's parlor, Clare becomes white and voiceless. To lose her blackness means "to be invisible" in Clare's mind (Dagbovie 2006, 98). However, in Kitty's eyes Clare's white body misrepresents "blackness" putting her into an unbearable position. Clare's skin becomes a processual surface of passings and becomings inseparable from her identity construction. However, it is potentially a site of the third space, or hybrid encounters. In terms of signification, Clare's creolized skin could be compared with writing, to apply Stacey's and Ahmed's methodology. For them the skin becomes a sign which "can be 'cut off' and made signify anew. It can acquire new meanings, new forms, and new shapes. But this potential does not render irrelevant the historical context in which skin has already been marked" (Ahmed & Stacey 2001, 15). I suggest that those new meanings are bound to an intersectional understanding of embodiment of identities in the postcolonial critical work. They can be read in the wider context of gender, class, and sexuality.

Clare's identity has the same kind of fluidity as her skin-color. It does not only destabilize the limits of urban and rural, mother and father, European and African, as well as those of class and ethnicity, but also the ones connected to femininity and heterosexuality. A place offered for girls is strange for Clare. She does not want to attend her grandmother's tea party; she would rather play outside with boys "attempting to change what seems to be fixed" as Jennifer

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71 See for more on the effects of class in Miss Mattie's actions Agosto 1999, 107.

Thorington Springer articulates (2007, 51). Clare tries to reach the gendered position reserved for boys, and is truly disappointed when she is denied this option. She rejects the role of a passive princess reaching the role of a prince – the prince who crowns Zoe as her princess: “Clare got a flame-red blossom of hibiscus and put it behind Zoe’s left ear and told her friend that she should be a princess and that Clare would be a prince [---]” (A, 101). Her ambivalent feelings toward Zoe need to be justified with the traditionally masculine role. Clare has inherited the homophobic attitude from her parents, and it is typical of their social milieu. Their prejudices are made clear as one of their relatives proves to be gay (A, 125). *Abeng* poses the serious question concerning homophobia in Jamaican culture. Homosexuality is represented a virus-like danger which needs to be removed.<sup>72</sup> Thus Clare’s own lesbian sentiments are contradicting the internalized limits of normality and her views on sexuality are challenged. *Abeng*, as Lisa Walker suggests, invites a reader to interpret it as “a lesbian *Bildungsroman*” (Walker 2001, 141).<sup>73</sup>

However, Clare’s attempts towards a more masculine role fail as she accidentally ends up shooting one of Miss Mattie’s bulls after an unsuccessful hunting trip with Zoe. She is punished for her inappropriate behaviour by her parents, who send her to Boy’s white relative to live and learn how to be a proper lady. Clare is, to apply ideas of Angeletta K.M. Gourdine, excluded from male homosociality while she experiences the female homosocial liaisons strange.<sup>74</sup> The relative Clare is sent to is the same “narrow minded white lady” with whom Clare should educate herself “to take advantage of who she is” (A, 150). These expected processes of social learning highlight the multifaceted nature of identities in the novel. In *Abeng*, Zoe seems to be the point of reflection for Clare: through her she starts to realize some facts about her surrounding reality. Clare understands that “she lived in a world where the worst thing to be – especially of you were a girl – was to be dark. The only thing worse was to be dead” (A, 50).

To conclude, Clare’s continuing friction with the boundaries of her community highlight, as Agosto argues, that “subjectivity is socially constructed and that racial, gender, and class boundaries defining unified individuals are really strategies to exclude ‘others’” (Agosto 1999, 114). Nonetheless, the narrator in *Abeng* emphasizes the role of matrilineal, feminist versions of de-colonizing counter-history. This counter-history needs to be uncovered from

72 I analyse this theme more in detail below. See for more on Jamaican homophobia in e.g. Chin 1997, Elia 2000, Glave 2000, Skelton 1995, and Thorington Springer 2007.

73 In the beginning of 1980s lesbian feminists of color started to demand recognition for their particular experiences within the lesbian movement. They suggested that mere sexuality is not a sufficient base for their multi-dimensional cultural identity. *Abeng*, which was published in 1984, is in Walker’s words “located in the moment when issues of visibility, difference, boundaries and hybridity emerge in lesbian fiction and criticism” (Walker 2001, 140).

74 See Gourdine 2002, 80. Homosociality is a term developed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her seminal study, *Between Men* (1985) meaning social bonds between males. Sedgwick analyses homosocial bonds as a “strategy for making generalizations about, and marking historical difference in, the *structure* of men’s relations with other men” (Sedgwick 1985, 2). Angeletta K.M. Gourdine draws on Sedgwick’s study in her discussion of female homosociality in the context of feminist writing of color. Gourdine defines her use of female homosociality as a term which identifies women who love men and resist patriarchy” [---], they whether exist within heterosexual contracts, or consciously object to them (such as marriage). “While these women have not been sexually involved with women, they have a passionate commitment to women” (Gourdine 2002, 80).

“archaeological” sources rather than from books. Feminist resistance has an important role in countering the cultural hegemony of colonizer, and the figures of women warriors are used as a “textual rebellion” within the novel. History is treated as an ideologically structured system of knowledge as the normative gender and sexual roles are contested. The Caribbean past is represented as a weft of multiple strands to be braided further in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

## 2.2. *No Telephone to Heaven*: An Inappropriate Other on Her Way Home

Clare’s story continues in *No Telephone to Heaven*. The novel is not linear, but one can trace Clare’s story from a 14 year old school girl until her untimely death at 36 when she is shot in the midst of her guerrilla warfare. The various scenes and flashbacks reflect Clare’s identity quest, which evolves from varied encounters and intersections. Her journey towards a rebellious female self committed to resistance is juxtaposed against her travels between USA, Europe, and Jamaica. In the end, the novel presents the fluctuating identity of a light-skinned, Creole woman who cannot be defined by conventional or essential categorizations of identity. Clare’s character undermines positions reserved for the “other” in colonial discourse. She is an inappropriate other, a woman searching for a place she can call ‘home’. The main focus of the novel is on Clare’s fluidity: her ability to pass as white, her dislocated self, her crossing between categories of identity and geographical continents. This fluidity is also reflected in its narrative structure which leaps from one scene to another, occasionally concentrating on minor characters. The fragmentary narration of the novel is a collection of voices, polyphony.<sup>75</sup>

*No Telephone to Heaven* is a story of passings, becoming, and transformations. These transformations and passings are not limited to the scope of race, ethnicity, and class but the binary structures of gender and sexuality are also contested. Clare’s best friend in the novel is the ethnically Creole, transgendered Harry/Harriet, who is both a nurse and a traditional healer. His/her gentle character transcends the borders of genders, sexualities, and Western and local traditions rendering the binary models of identity obsolete. For example Ramchandran Sethuraman describes Cliff’s ambivalent double-articulations in *No Telephone to Heaven* as exploding “the fixed boundaries of identity and difference” (Sethuraman 1997, 251). These double articulations are also structurally reflected within the narrative technique. Indeed, I suggest that the polyphonic narrative technique is used in the novel to force the Western, traditionally linear, novel-genre to face the challenge of postcolonial multi-voiced reality.

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75 Fiona R. Barnes interprets that the fragmentary, hybrid narrative structure of *No Telephone to Heaven* mirrors the Jamaican cultural hybridity (Barnes 1992, 29). The structure is a symbol for impossibility of single-voiced, linear synthesis in a postcolonial condition. Moreover Barnes argues that the novel criticises the Western genre of *Bildungsroman*. Even though it carries the tradition of Western, individualistic genre of *Bildungsroman*, it is politicized by paralleling the protagonists’ development and “the political and social awakening of their countries” (Barnes 1992, 29).



In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare's journey towards identity becomes narrated achronologically. The end of the story is the beginning of the narrative, so that the reader first encounters Clare in the back of a truck with other guerrillas. In the truck, she begins to look back on the events that had led her there. Breaking the canonized form of the Western *Bildungsroman*, the end of her *Bildung* is placed in the very beginning of the novel<sup>76</sup> and the reader is led through Clare's journey piece by piece in a manner that is reminiscent of the non-linear structure of remembering. The non-linearity is further emphasized with a variety of minor characters. It is not Clare's individual story but an interwoven texture of Jamaican lives. In addition to Harry/Harriet, Christopher, a poor boy who grew up in a Kingston shanty, and who is eventually driven to commit violent murders, is also important. Christopher works as a gardener in the house of his friend, Paul. He kills Paul and his whole family including their domestic servant Mavis. The polyphonic narrative structure of *No Telephone to Heaven* is highlighted in the murder-scene which is one of the key-moments in the novel. The scene is first depicted from the point of view of the upper-class character Paul, then from the point of view of Christopher. If Harry/Harriet represents the problematized vectors of gender and sexuality, the vectors of class and social status are exposed in the scenes with Paul, Mavis and Christopher. The narrator underlines how certain mechanisms of Jamaican life can only be seen from the points of view of Christopher and Mavis, they are not visible to Paul.<sup>77</sup>

Clare's own journey towards identity begins with the migration to the USA with her family. After Miss Mattie's death, Boy Savage decides that nothing holds them in Jamaica anymore, so they take a plane to Florida with the intention of driving to New York. The drive from Florida to New York proves to be a significant journey for Clare as it is during this trip that she learns about the racist history of the USA. For Boy, the journey and finally New York simply mean a new start. He assimilates quickly as he finds employment and friends and finally breaks all his ties to Jamaica. Stacey Floyd-Thomas and Laura Gillman interpret Boy's assimilation as internalized double-consciousness, "the white mask he is wearing" (Floyd-Thomas & Gillman 2002, 542). Boy constantly reminds Clare about the importance of passing. "Through all this – all this new life – he counsels his daughter on invisibility and its secrets. Self-effacement. Blending in. The uses of camouflage" (NTH, 100). Kitty, for her part, becomes alienated. She feels that she has lost her home. The racism Kitty encounters in New York is one of the major motifs of the novel. She slowly becomes excluded and silenced. In the end, Kitty packs her bags and flies back to Jamaica leaving Boy and Clare in New York. However, she takes Clare's younger sister,

76 According to Maria Helena Lima this is typical of the Caribbean *Bildungsroman* – the story begins rather from death than birth (Lima 1993a, 441). The beginning both undermines and re-writes the Western generic formula. *No Telephone to Heaven* begins from the very events which directly lead to Clare's death. The narration begins from the end of the story-line. I concur with Maureen Moynagh who claims that the development of an autonomous subject is challenged in Cliff's re-written *Bildungsroman*. Moynagh states that "for Clare, the *Bildungsroman* turns out to be, quite literally, a death trap" (Moynagh 1999, 120).

77 Ramchandran Sethuraman uses the term "double gazed" narrative to describe the story of Paul and Christopher. Sethuraman interprets that when Paul fails to chronicle the lives of Mavis and Christopher the novel represents the larger problematics of "subalterns in history and as history". Paul cannot "appropriate the 'other' as History" (Sethuraman 1997, 267).



Jennie, who has darker skin corresponding to the deeply rooted nature of color-lines in Kitty's mind, with her. Clare is left without any connections to her Caribbean heritage. Her only way of coping in this situation is to assimilate and to forget – to become white. Yet Clare remains sensitive to her African Caribbean roots, and does not adjust herself to the life Boy is building for them. She argues with her father by declaring that “‘My mother was a nigger’ – speaking the word at him. [...] ‘And so am I’, she added softly” (NTH, 104). Soon after this, she moves to England to study.

In England, however, Clare feels completely displaced. The country she has been taught to regard as the ‘mother country’ abandons her. Clare becomes culturally inappropriate. As someone of very light skin, she is not a target of racist remarks, but she is forced to witness them, which hurts her deeply. Thus in England Clare is considered white, which was also the case in Jamaica, unlike in the USA where she was treated as colored despite Boy's efforts. As her ‘whiteness’ marginalizes her from her maternal Jamaicanness, her “coloredness” marginalizes her in Anglo-American settings. Cliff's narration challenges the discourse of natural, ‘obvious’ racial categorizations. It illustrates the technique Carine M. Mardorossian calls as a “revision of regimes of corporeality” which she considers a typical feature of Caribbean writings (Mardorossian 2005, 15). In the USA, Boy tries to enrol Clare at a “good” high school and the principal, Mrs. Taylor, asks in an interview about her race. As Boy boldly replies “White....of course” (NTH, 98), Principal Taylor reacts by quoting the words her husband, a physician, would say:

He would call you the white chocolate.....I mean, have you ever seen a child's expression when he finds a white chocolate bunny in his Easter basket? He simply doesn't understand....He thinks it strange. I do not want to be cruel, Mr. Savage, but we have no room for *lies* in our system. *No place for in-betweens.* (NTH, 99 emphasis added).

For a physician and for the Principal Clare is “a lie in a system”, just as Harry/Harriet is in-between genders.<sup>78</sup>

Kim Robinson-Walcott writes about “the peculiar loneliness of the white Jamaican” (Robinson-Walcott 2003, 98). Nearly white people, such as Clare, have a particular position because they are disparaged by fully white people, but they are also marginalized within coinciding Black is Beautiful Movement and Black Power. Robinson-Walcott writes that “history has burdened the white West Indian with his own peculiar set of baggage: as past oppressor and present threatened minority, saddled with collective guilt but still holding the reins of power” (Robinson-Walcott 2003, 96). Clare's experiences in the USA illustrate the dual cultural context of Cliff's novels. In addition to Caribbean cultural milieu, they reflect the African American experiences in the 1960s, thereby connecting Cliff to the literary tradition of American feminism of color. Cliff has thematized this loneliness of a nearly white Creole particularly in her

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<sup>78</sup> I agree with Mardorossian, who claims that Caribbean authors have the tendency to challenge race as fixed, visual category. In the Caribbean race is something other than a “site of difference anchored in the body” (Mardorossian 2005, 15).

debut collection *Claiming an Identity They Taught me to Despise*. However, as Robinson-Walcott reminds, this kind of claiming is “more limited the darker one’s skin color is: the whiter the skin, the more one’s options are expanded” (Robinson-Walcott 2003, 96). In one way or another, Clare is always an outsider, inappropriate, motherless, and homeless. Clare’s ultimate challenge is to find her options and search for home, an imaginary place where she could feel *at home*.

According to Robinson-Walcott, Clare needs to overcome “the trauma of a light-skinned person being trained to pass for white” (Robinson-Walcott 2003, 99). It becomes clear in the novel that to do this she must claim her maternal culture as home. Alone in England Clare’s sanity is threatened. Sliding more deeply into her sense of in-betweenness, she starts to identify herself with Bertha Mason, a Creole woman in *Jane Eyre* (1847). Clare feels herself particularly anxious in situations where her skin-color and academic education are the only traits characterizing her. One such event occurs in London during a racist rally. People in the rally are holding signs reading e.g. “KEEP BRITAIN WHITE!” (NTH, 137). Clare’s friend Liz is trying to console her by saying that: “You are hardly the sort they were ranting on about” (NTH, 139). This makes Clare even more upset, and she replies:

”You mean I’m presentable. That I’m somehow lower down the tree, higher up the scale, whatever.” Clare was having hard time keeping the bitterness from her voice. [---]. “Some of my ancestors were Caribs...cannibals.” (NTH, 139.)

Clare must leave because she does not want to offend her well-meaning friend. She identifies herself with blackness and otherness, because there is no room in between.

Clare’s subjectivity is, however, more ambivalent than that. It is affected by the imbalance between her multiple intersecting axis of identity: her middle-class position, gender, and sexual identity. Clare’s private, elite, school-taught British accent separates her from the vital patois of her home country, while the set of values of the school are not in dialogue with the goals to which she emotionally adheres. As Sethuraman sums up, Clare is an outsider who is painstakingly trying to “reinvent herself as the Other” (Sethuraman 1997, 278), but is regulated by the cultural metanarratives defining “endorsed” identities. Clare has a “migratory subjectivity”, to use the term by Carole Boyce Davies to describe the black women’s subjectivity which exists in multiple places and positions. Davies connects this sense of subjectivity to black women’s writing which should be read as “a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing” redefining “identity away from exclusion and marginality” (Davies 1994, 4). Davies connects her understanding of migratory subjectivity to the horizons of resistance and slipperiness. Migratory subjects cannot be “located and framed in terms of one specific place” but they exist in a myriad of places “eluding the terms of discussion” (Davies 1994, 36). I would argue that Clare’s identity process is not so much a journey towards a coherent identity as in the traditional *Bildungsroman*, but the novel is mapping the facets of prismatic<sup>79</sup> identity as they are installed and re-installed within different discourses.

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79 I have borrowed the term “prismatic” from Giovanna Covi. See Covi 1996.

*No Telephone to Heaven* does not merely present Clare's identity as constituted; it is a novel about the constant and on-going process of constituting the migrant subjectivity. At the end of the story-line, Clare's identity remains processual as the narrator describes her: "White. Black. Female. Lover. Beloved. Daughter. Traveller. Friend. Scholar. Terrorist. Farmer" (NTH, 91). I suggest that in Cliff's writing the process of identity seems to be a multiply eluding, intersectional journey deconstructing the coherencies of identity politics.<sup>80</sup>

Aware of her new processual identity, Clare does not descend into madness in England, as Bertha Mason did, but decides to leave London. She wanders around Europe with her boyfriend Bobby, who was severely traumatized by his experiences in the Vietnam War and was subsequently discharged from the military. Clare notices that endless travelling does not soothe her pain. She explains to Bobby: "I feel like a shadow...like a ghost...like I could float through my days without ever touching...anyone. I truly cannot remember when I did not feel this way. Locked off" (NTH, 154). Similarly, Clare's heterosexual love affair with Bobby and the idea of motherhood, as she becomes pregnant with his child, do not seem right to her. Her miscarriage is a source of relief: "Something slid out of her suddenly – it could have been a late heavy period for all she knew, or a baby with half a brain. Relief" (NTH, 157).

As a drifter, with Bobby, Clare becomes an "inappropriate other". Trinh T. Minh-ha uses the term to describe a subject who, in refusing to accept the position of "other", is simultaneously an insider and an outsider of a particular culture. An inappropriate other rebels against behaving "correctly" and resists the process of appropriation demanded by hegemony. As "inappropriated", the other has agency negotiating her situation which is "not quite the Same, not quite the Other" (Trinh 1991, 74). Clare refuses to take the possibility "to pass" as white, though it is offered to her on many occasions, and to deny her creolized, ambivalent position rebelling against the appropriation.<sup>81</sup> Thus Clare's intersectional identity cannot be characterized as merely oppressed. As Davies argues, the migratory subjectivity is diasporic in a sense that it assumes "elsewhereness" (Davies 1994, 37). This kind of elsewhereness is present in Clare's understanding of herself, and she struggles to find a way to balance the different facets of her identity. The elsewhereness, however, does not make the longing for a place disappear: even though Clare feels that Jamaica is no longer her home she feels the desire to connect with some kind of a fictional homeland – to locate herself culturally.

Finally Clare decides to travel back to Jamaica. She is seriously ill after the miscarriage and unable to make any decisions. However, the return is not the final destination in Clare's

80 See for more on identities in *No Telephone to Heaven* e.g. Agosto 1999, Chassot 2009, Floyd-Thomas and Gillman 2002, Gouridine 2003, MacDonald-Smythe 2001, Raikin 1996, Sethuraman 1997, Smith 2009, Toland-Dix 2004, Walters 1998.

81 According to Sophie Lehmann's insightful interpretation, Cliff's project is to write "herself back into history and culture" (Lehmann 1998, 102). The catalyst of this project is the fear of passing – the fear of being assimilated and forgotten. Even though Lehmann speaks in biographical terms, this fear of passing is present in Clare's character. In *No Telephone to Heaven* passing is not merely a point of being forgotten but a way of "being cut off from one's community", to use the words of Lehmann (1998, 102), as Kitty does to Clare in anticipation of Clare's ability to pass as white. The fear of passing is a central theme in Cliff's collection of writings *Land of Look Behind*. About the fear of passing in *Abeng*, see Dagbovie 2006.

journey of processing her identity.<sup>82</sup> She still feels as though she were in-between and is compelled to negotiate her place in Jamaica. One of the most significant agents in this process is Clare's best friend Harry/Harriet, who becomes a metonymy of the wide range of deconstructions and hybridities envisioned in the novel. S/he is a figure in whom many sides of Jamaican creolité unite. Not only has he been raped by a white man as a little boy, s/he wears a red cape, like British soldiers who had red-coats. As an adult, s/he is both man and woman, black and white, gay and straight, and when s/he ends her working hours in a modern hospital s/he hurries to the homes of poor people healing them with traditional African Caribbean methods (NTH, 171). Later on, it is Harry/Harriet who guides Clare to educate herself in Caribbean history and to join the little Guerrilla-group with him/her. In the end, this is the site of radical agency for Clare.<sup>83</sup>

However, for Clare the feeling of being *at home* requires more than just rebellious activism: the re-interpretations of sexual and gender norms are also needed. Only then can her emotional exile – which started when she was banished from the Miss Mattie's farm in Abeng because of the conduct inappropriate for girls<sup>84</sup> – is over. By the end of the novel the narrator hints that an erotic relationship between Clare and Harry/Harriet has begun. As Agosto argues, Cliff does not only seduce readers into accepting homosexuality, she also takes them to “the point where gender identities dissolve before their very eyes, shattering the comfort of expected” (Agosto 1999, 121). Categories of gender and sexual norms are proven to be socially and culturally constituted and maintained. Thus, they too must be processed in order to feel “at home” in a particular cultural location. Thus, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, the concept of home is far more complex than a mere geographical location. Home can also be a site of ambivalence for women like Clare, as Myriam Chancy has noted in her insightful study *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* (1997). It can be a place of violence, a political threat, exploitative labour practises, or “impossibility of imagining moments of leisure, moments for the nurturance of the soul” (Chancy 1997, 2). It consists of re-negotiations of those socially

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82 Clare's return is not simply a return home: she needs to re-built her home to feel *at home*. Belinda Edmondson argues that, as a Creole woman, she occupies a “location that is elsewhere” whether in Jamaica or Europe. Clare's challenge is to consciously overcome and re-negotiate this cultural sense of “elsewhereness”, to apply Davies' terminology. (See Edmondson 1999; 135, 145-6, 164.) Meryl F. Schwartz, instead, remarks that even though “Clare's social position allows her to choose whether or not she is going to listen to the discourse of ‘the other’, she will remain divided against herself until she decides to do so” (Schwartz 1996, 292). Schwartz goes on to argue that home in Michelle Cliff's texts is “ultimately to be found in the imagined communities we create through taking responsibility for both hearing suppressed stories and acting on what we have learned” (Schwartz 1996, 305).

83 As a result of the commitment to the guerrillas Constance S. Richards connects *No Telephone to Heaven* to the nationalist revolutionary literature Fanon celebrates, although she admits that Cliff's nationalist discourse is complicated with questions of gender, sexuality, and color privilege (Richards 2005, 22). Even though I do not disagree with Richards, my own reading highlights feminist, hybrid, creolized, and queered perspectives on *No Telephone to Heaven*. For me, it is not merely Nationalism which “serves as a site of awakening” (Richards 2005, 30) for Clare and Harry/Harriet.

84 See Toland-Dix 2004, 43. Shirley Toland-Dix interprets that Clare's exile starts way earlier than in USA which is often named as the starting point in Cliff research. It already starts in Jamaica when Clare is banished from her grandmother's place and Kitty distances herself from her in belief that her daughter will embrace whiteness. When Kitty abandons her in the USA, Clare is rejected for the second time “by the matrilineage by which she so longs to be acknowledged” (Toland-Dix 2004, 45).

constituted categories that define 'normality' too narrowly. Clare's fictional home is built out of subversive gendered and sexual practises, of matrilineal tradition, of racial fluidity, of African-Caribbean history, and of political resistance with the guerrilla-group.

'Home' in *No Telephone to Heaven* is a cross-road of intersecting local, queered, and feminist spheres. At the very end of the story, which in the novel is depicted fragmentarily, the guerrilla-group moves to Miss Mattie's farm, which has by now been inherited by Clare. The group clear and repair the over-grown place. This, finally, becomes Clare's home – the re-built home where her emotional exile is turned into a realm of resistance and 're-membling'. The grandmother's farm filled with guerrillas is a symbol of re-found matrilineal heritage, colonial resistance and, moreover, a possibility for queered sexual encounters.<sup>85</sup> Clare's quest for alternative identity culminates in the guerrilla group which aims to resist neocolonial efforts in Jamaica. As Shirley Toland-Dix notes, Clare's awakening does not entail individual privilege but communal empowerment (Toland-Dix 2004, 43). The guerrillas plan to sabotage a film shooting, which the narrator describes as a mere commoditisation of Jamaican history romanticizing the colonial past. As Maureen Moynagh argues, the objective of the guerrillas "seems to be quintessentially postmodern": they are not attacking political or corporational targets, but a representation (Moynagh 1999, 123).<sup>86</sup> The guerrillas are however betrayed and Clare dies in the action.

In Clare's case, as Nana Wilson-Tagoe argues, the question of reinterpreting one's own origins is a necessity that can put a Caribbean subject "in a meaningful context of space and time and enlarge" his or her consciousness of the self (See Wilson-Tagoe 1998, 253).<sup>87</sup> In *No Telephone to Heaven*, like *Abeng*, Caribbean origins are inscribed into the archives of the landscape. However, I suggest that the difference between these two novels is a type of the archive: while in *Abeng*, it is Jamaica's national history which needs to be brought to the surface, in *No Telephone to Heaven* it is Clare's personal history. After a bathing trip to a river near Miss Mattie's, Clare is laying on the rocks with Harry/Harriet. Suddenly, she starts to remember the stories of her girlhood. As these stories begin to intertwine, she finally recognizes where she comes from:

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85 For more on the question of home as a site of rebellion and resistance see Davies 1994, 16-7 and 113-29. However, the theme of "home" cannot be romanticized. Especially, for lesbians and other members of sexual minorities, 'home' can be a place of forced heteronormativity. Thus, the journeying, diaspora, and migration can also be thought in terms of feminist liberation. The migration can be the way to question the violent oppression happening at home – as happens in Clare's case. See for more on the questions of homes, imaginary homes, and home-building in Cliff's fiction Schwartz 1996 and MacDonald-Smythe 2001. See on journeying as a form of liberation Paravisini-Gebert and Romero-Cesareo 2001.

86 The chapter depicting this scene is called "Film Noir". Moynagh presents an insightful analysis on Cliff's ways of subverting *film noir* conventions and playing with its stereotypes. For an analysis of the film, see Moynagh 1999, 123-126.

87 Wilson-Tagoe discusses Africa, which has offered a sense of origins for West Indian authors. Africa has loomed as a reality and as an idea of the past. I suggest that in Cliff's fiction the nostalgia for "African authenticity" is already replaced by Jamaica and its hybridity, with matrilineage, and with resistance symbolized by Nanny and the Maroons. For Cliff Africa is no longer the idealized sense of origins as it is for example in Paule Marshall's widely read novel *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983).

After their bath, they lay together on the rocks, and Clare let herself drift further. Each bend in the river came back to her. The special rocks where crayfish slept underneath. The deep places you could dive without harm. The pool named for a man who suffered from fits. The pool named for a girl made pregnant by an uncle. The dam made by a man who kept hogs. The five croton trees – dragon's blood – marking off the burial place of slaves, at the side of river, on a slight rise. Unquiet ground, that – children feared the anger of the spirits, who did not rest, who had not been sung to their new home. Her mother had told her of the slaves. *Her people*. Yes. (NTH, 174 emphasis added.)

Clare's memory brings her into contact with the collective past of her people. Caribbean nature is, as in *Abeng*, filled with signs of the memory and untold history. However, now it is Clare rather than the omniscient narrator who is able to read the signs. Moreover, I would argue that it is not a coincidence that this moment of realization occurs during an intimate moment with Harry/Harriet. Clare's embodied identity is finally in harmony with her socially processed selfhood.

Antonia MacDonald-Smythe, Angeletta K.M. Gourdine and Meryl Schwartz have contributed to the debates on the question of home in *No Telephone to Heaven*. MacDonald-Smythe argues that Clare finds her community via Harry/Harriet. The couple's liminality "free of fixed representation" while "committed to a poetics of resistance" brings them 'home' (MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 101). Gourdine proposes that Clare travels through the "home is nowhere" phase, only to "find that Jamaica is where the home *can be*" (Gourdine 2002, 48). Schwartz, instead, notes that "in identifying herself with an imagined community of ancestral and living victims of colonialism, Clare has achieved significant reconciliation of the fragments of which she is composed" (Schwartz 1996, 302). I propose that "home" in *No Telephone to Heaven* is the site of de-colonized subjectivity, where the several intersecting axes of one's identity come together enabling the "textual rebellion" of the inappropriate other. Cliff's rebellious textuality, however, becomes even more vocal in her next novel *Free Enterprise*, which transforms the Jamaican cultural location of *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* into a realm of transnationality.

### 2.3. *Free Enterprise*: Towards Transnational Histories of Resistance

*Free Enterprise* is a novel focusing on transnational resistance of women of color. The novel chronicles the forgotten achievements by abolitionist women building a feminist archive for those who fought against and suffered from slavery. As Nada Elia remarks, it uses archives which are deemed as 'fiction' by historians – "walks through gardens they [the women who resisted] planted, lingering memories of lullabies they sang to their grandchildren, bank accounts in their names, stamps in their passports" (Elia 2001, 73). *Free Enterprise* unsettles the boundary between fact and fiction by telling stories about historical characters forgotten in history books. It turns the nightmarish history of the region into a healing genealogy of resistance of several minorities. In the following, I will introduce the characters and the central themes of the

novel including rearticulated history, transnationalism, capitalism and the politics of representation. *Free Enterprise* is a manifold assemblage of narratives framed by the story of John Brown's famous raid on Harper's Ferry.<sup>88</sup> The raid, which took place 16.10.1859 in Virginia, was funded by Mary Ellen Pleasant, a coloured hotel-owner from San Francisco and one of the central figures of *Free Enterprise*.<sup>89</sup>

Transnational feminism is a critical tool for examining the various forms of coalitional politics from postcolonial and gendered perspectives. *Free Enterprise* exceeds the narrow understandings of identity politics which presupposes 'us versus them' -divisions. It focuses on transnationally shared experiences of oppression while taking into consideration different kinds of local histories. Chandra Talpade Mohanty defines her transnational feminist orientation by "focusing on antiracist feminist engagement with the multiple effects of globalization and on building solidarities" (Mohanty 2003, 12). Transnational feminism takes into account the localized politics of situated knowledges and histories, but it also recognizes the effects of globalist powers, such as capitalism, expatriation, and cultural appropriation which are all gendered and affect women more negatively than men.<sup>90</sup> Transnational feminism in the field of literary studies, as defined by Constance S. Richards, is assigned to analyze how global flows of capital, expressed in a myriad of ways, affect the lives of women of minorities, but it also focuses on the ways solidarity, common experiences, and empathy among women across cultures are represented in literature (Richards 2000, 13). However, as Richards notes, the stage of transnational feminism can only be reached after local awareness. For Richards, a critical female subjectivity is possible through "figuring out her own location which often looks for a space beyond the cultural in a 'pure or original femininity'" (Richards 2000, 27). The next phase goes beyond narrow feminisms and recognizes the interrelationship between essentialized identities. The third phase "makes possible the coalition building based upon feelings of empathy across identity categories" (Richards 2000, 27). I would argue that her three phase model is visible in Cliff's novels. More Caribbean feminist processes in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* precede the transnational feminist agenda present in *Free Enterprise*.

The global flows of goods, ideas, signs, meanings, and people are pinpointed in *Free Enterprise* as it addresses the ecological catastrophe on the islands caused by colonial movements (FE 54-6) and the global network of slavery based on capitalism (FE, 76-9). The slave economy is strongly juxtaposed against current globalist corporatism in the novel, as the characters often refer it to simply as "the trade", Erica L. Johnson notes (Johnson 2009, 118). In this section, I

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88 John Brown (1800-1859) was an American abolitionist who committed himself to ending slavery. He attempted to lead a raid on the federal armory in Harper's Ferry, Virginia in order to arm the slaves. The raid, however, was unsuccessful, and several pro-slavery southerners were killed. Brown was captured and executed by hanging on 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec. 1859. It is commonly agreed that the events at Harper's Ferry escalated the conflicts that later led to secession starting the Civil War.

89 In an interview with Judith Raiskin, Cliff herself names the novel as "semi-historical" because of several authentic events and characters (Raiskin 1993, 64).

90 See Mohanty 2003, 1-13; Grewal & Kaplan 1997, 1-33 and Richards 2000, 1-38. It is noteworthy that for all of these writers transnational feminism has a strong connection to anticapitalist struggles and the critique of globalist flows of consumable products machinated by international (multi)corporations.



shall argue that the theme of *Free Enterprise* underlines the transnational feminist experiences as it highlights shared experiences of oppression, coalitional solidarities across borders, but also localized histories and practises among marginalized women as they encounter and unite in resistance.<sup>91</sup> The novel focuses on the transnationally shared ethos of rebellious women and their coalitional antiracist efforts. These multiple efforts have been shadowed by a well documented history of John Brown.

It is told that after the unsuccessful raid followed by the hanging of John Brown a note was found in his pocket. The note was signed by “MEP” which is the only evidence that Mary Ellen Pleasant was involved in the raid even though her financial support was a “public secret”.<sup>92</sup> Nowadays, the only thing remembered about that raid is the valor of white abolitionists; it is often a story of one male hero. Cliff “embroiders”, to use MacDonald-Smythe’s term, the involvement of women into the textual corpus of abolition history (see MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 158). The narrator of *Free Enterprise* reflects, in many words, on history as “an official version” which needs to be written anew:

The official version has been printed, bound, and gagged, resides in schools, libraries, the majority unconscious. Serves the common good. Does not cause trouble. Walks across tapestries, the television screen. Does not give aid and comfort to the enemy. [---]. The official version is presented to the people. With friezes of heroes, statues free-standing in vest-pocket parks, in full costume on Main Street, on auditorium stages in elementary schools [---]. The official version entertains. Illuminates the Great White Way. (FE, 16-7.)

The official version is something seemingly “normal”, and easy to receive from the media. In Cliff’s version, Mary Ellen is a rich hotel owner, a millionaire of her time. Her hotels seem to be a harmless boarding house enterprise. However, as MacDonald-Smythe interprets, she “succeeds in the covert manipulation” and she “plays the convivial mammy” (MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 158). She is involved in abolitionary struggles: her hotels are used as safe houses for southern slaves seeking refuge. Nonetheless, in history books she is often remembered as “Mammy Pleasant” who was suspected of owning brothels. Shortly before her death, she supposedly dictated her biography and confessed to giving 30 000 dollars to John Brown for arms. In Cliff’s novel, Mary Ellen Pleasant is one of those few who could free herself from the public expectation set on colored women. Her financial wealth also gave her independence in her dealings with

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91 My use of the term *transnational* as a positive marker follows the terminology presented in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2006) by Loomba et al. They use the terms “global and globalism” to refer to those international movements connected to myriad (often capitalist) ways oppressing the developing world and its people even further. They refer to new liberalism, multicorporated commercialism, appropriated identities and commercialized culture of consumerism. However, they seem to use the term “transnational” to refer to the more positive side of international exchange e.g. The World Social Forum, nongovernmental agencies, the movements of activists, postcolonial studies etc. They define transnationalism “as a collective counterweight to the symbolic and material power of globalization” (Loomba et al. 2006, 16).

92 For more on the historical facts concerning the raid see Chancy 1997, 180-1 and Raiskin 1993, 65.



men: a rarity even for upper-class white women of that time. This theme is also present in *Free Enterprise*.<sup>93</sup>

The stories about Mary Ellen's fictional parents, both rebellious in different ways, are also incorporated into *Free Enterprise*. These narratives provide different perspectives for the narrator to approach the subject of transnational resistance in the novel's composition. Moreover, their stories are a way to incorporate the Caribbean into the otherwise North American story. Mary Ellen's mother is a native Caribbean named Quasheba and known for her skills in "forging gunmetal" (FE, 129). Quasheba teaches her daughter ancient African rites and shares her knowledge as a gunsmith to Maroon-communities hiding in the USA.<sup>94</sup> Mary Ellen's father is Captain Parsons who smuggled Caribbean runaway slaves to the Northern States and thus freedom in his ship *Daedalus*.<sup>95</sup> In the novel, both Quasheba and Captain Parsons symbolize the counter-history of diasporic "Black Atlantic", the transatlantic cultural space. Their memory fuels the resistance of Mary Ellen.

Another protagonist of the novel is Mary Ellen's comrade and a sister in arms, Annie Christmas. *Free Enterprise* begins with the depiction of the aging Annie's lonely life in the Mississippi delta area. She has retreated to her little cottage after the traumatizing imprisonment and escape following the failed raid at Harper's Ferry. Her friendship with Mary Ellen and her youthful years are presented to the reader in flashbacks. Like Clare, Annie is a very light-skinned Caribbean Creole, who is described in almost identical terms. Annie is a fictional character in the novel, interpreted as Clare's foremother and Michelle Cliff's alter ego by Nada Elia (Elia 2001, 75). Annie's home island is not specified, she is just from "an island in the Caribbean" (FE, 24), an exile. Like Clare, Annie is a migrant, displaced girl simultaneously privileged by her middle-class background and oppressed because of the ambivalent color of her skin. Annie does not accept her mother's values and dreams of passing as a privileged upper class white woman, and escapes to the USA changing her name from Regina to Annie. Thus, like Clare, "she began her revolting behaviour with her own escape" (FE, 11) because Regina, later Annie, feels that the imperial ideals on her island are too strong. In *Free Enterprise*, it is Annie's character who connects the Caribbean diasporic experience to the American history of slavery.

93 For more on the life of Mary Ellen Pleasant see Chancy 1997, 180-1; Elia 2001, 74-5; Skinner and Waller 1998, 103 and MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 158-9.

94 According to Mimi Sheller "the feisty female slave was commonly caricatured in Jamaican publications in the early nineteenth century with a character named 'Quasheba' who was known as an independent and outspoken trouble-maker" (Sheller 1998, 91). Quasheba's caricature was common in different kinds of nineteenth century publications. Even though Quasheba has been a target of much colonialist parody, her character has also been a symbol of resistance for women of color (see Sheller 1998, *passim*).

95 According to classical mythology, the skilled craftsman Daedalus fabricated wings for himself and his son Icarus so that they could flee from the imprisonment from Crete Island where they were held by King Minos. The name also refers to James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and its protagonist Stephen Dedalus who declares in the last page of the novel: "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race". (See also Ledent 2000, 87 n. 5). The same intertext is connected to Cliff's work by M.M. Adjarian who instead claims that Clare Savage is "the heir of Stephen Dedalus" as they both want to escape "the nightmare of history" (Adjarian 2000, 71).

In the USA, Annie meets Mary Ellen at an event where they are going to listen to a lecture called “The Education and the Elevation to the Colored Race” by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Watkins Harper did actually give that particular lecture in 1858.<sup>96</sup> Watkins Harper’s historically authentic views concerning “The Talented Tenth” were meant to improve the situation of colored people by finding the most talented black persons. These persons were to be educated as strong leaders for the more “mediocre” ones.<sup>97</sup> Both Annie and Mary Ellen are highly critical of Watkins’ ideas. Soon after the lecture, Mary Ellen initiates Annie into the group planning the raid with John Brown. Annie’s only human contacts in the Mississippi delta are lepers isolated in the leper colony of Carville<sup>98</sup> – the most marginalized people hidden from the eyes of others. In Carville, Annie participates in story-telling sessions with the lepers who have the sessions in order to remember their own lives, names, and roots. There Annie also shares her experiences. The people in Carville come from Polynesia, the Pacific islands, or the Caribbean, highlighting the transnational experience and making the idea of ‘the island’ more metaphorical.

The stories told in Carville form the most transnational and polyvocal part of the novel. They represent transnational histories and are not conveyed to the reader through the narrator but through direct discourse. The lepers embody a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and during their storytellings they share not only their own tales but also those of their people. In the leper colony, Annie also meets Rachel who becomes her best friend in old age. Rachel is a Marrano-Jew<sup>99</sup> who teaches Annie to recognize the value of story-telling and the problems of silencing and hiding the traumas of imprisonment. Annie confesses that “sometimes... too much of time, I think all we have are these stories, and they are endangered. In years to come,

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96 One of the most famous novels of Watkins Harper is *Iola Leroy* (1892), the starting point of the so called “Tragic Mulatta Tradition”. The novels belonging to this tradition tell stories about girls of very light skin color who are able to pass as white and are often desired by men. However, the protagonists in these novels are often mistreated and unsuccessful in their life ending up having tragic destinies. Nevertheless, I suggest that *Free Enterprise* could be read as part of the continuum of “Tragic Mulatta Tradition” of American literature: It subversively transforms and politicizes the theme of assimilation and the “tragic Mulatta heroine” into a rebellious and radical feminist of color. For more on the “Mulatta Tradition” in literature see Bost 1998.

97 Harper’s ideas and works have also created a lot of controversy in scholarly discussions. Barbara Christian (an academic known for her work in the field of black feminist studies) criticizes her writings, and interprets that they are written to satisfy the needs of white readers. Christian claims that Harper’s colored heroines are appropriated by making them to adopt the right (white) values suitable for a “proper lady” (see Christian 1985, 233-7). Christian’s critique has been answered by Hazel Carby who does not accept her (and thus also the ones present in *Free Enterprise*) views. Carby considers Harper a central figure in Civil Right activism whose contribution to Abolitionism and in developing of W.E.B. DuBois’ thinking has been irreplaceable. (See Carby 1987, 63-93.)

98 Carville, Louisiana was one of the two facilities treating Hansen’s disease in the USA. A lot of important medical research was conducted there contributing to understanding and identifying leprosy. The Carville facility was not closed until 1999. Today the facility is a museum.

99 Marranos are Sephardic Jews from the Iberian area (also known as ‘hidden Jews’) who were forced to hide their ethnicity and convert to Christianity (only secretly preserving their own faith) or to escape inquisition – many of them escaped to the ‘New World’ (Chancy 1997, 178). The diaspora of Jews is often juxtaposed with the Caribbean diaspora in Cliff’s fiction. (See for more on the Judaism in Cliff’s fiction Raiskin 1993, 67-8.) *Free Enterprise* also parallels the Caribbean Maroons and Jewish Marranos and claims that they shared camps and hiding places in America (FE, 62-3; 183). In *Free Enterprise* the term ‘Maroon’ is used more widely than in the Clare Savage novels. It refers to various groups of refugees and rebellious people. However, it remains as a symbol of Cliff’s textual rebellion.

will anyone have heard them – our voices?” (FE, 59.) Finally, Annie understands the importance of telling one’s story. After a long time, she is able to write letters to Mary Ellen, revealing what happened to her during the imprisonment. The healing partnership of Annie and Rachel highlights the narrative juxtaposition of Maroon and Marrano rebellions in the novel. In Carville all the lepers from different backgrounds are identified as “others”, racialized in authoritarian discourse. According to Noraida Agosto, Cliff’s narration makes the reader aware of the dominant ideology of scientific racism which pathologized illness into racialized bodies (Agosto 1999, 125). However, *Free Enterprise* does more than that by subverting the pathologizing and unifying discourse as transnational solidarity destabilizing normative identity categories. More generally, the importance of transnationally shared experiences of resistance by oppressed people constitutes the main theme of *Free Enterprise*.

According to Inderpal Grewal and Karen Caplan, transnational feminism displaces the center-periphery model and de-mystifies the idea of locality as “other” while analyzing transnationally “scattered hegemonies” (Grewal & Kaplan 1997; 7, 9, 11). Respectively, one of the most prominent themes in *Free Enterprise* is its dismissal of the ideas connected to origins and authenticity, but it also proposes coalitional solidarities across differences: the people in Carville form a transnational community, Rachel lives with the maroons, Clover gets acquainted with the “buffalo soldiers”<sup>100</sup>, and when Parsons is in prison in Jamaica, he interacts with rebellious female prisoners. Moreover, the narrator describes Parsons’ crew as a new race for the New World: “The crewmen were a few generations into it, rising into the light through categories created by Jesuits” (FE, 111). Minority identity is not connected to the idea of “origins” or locations but to resistance and movements, the roots are turned into routes. The search for Caribbean history in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* is now transformed into a project of retracing the genealogy of many kinds of resistances. The metonymy of this project is the large tapestry Annie is trying to preserve:

Our historical moment was lost, so our tapestry is dissembled. Oh, it exists piece by piece. Some pieces have been buried with those who have passed on. Some are forgotten, misplaced. Some may line jewellery boxes, gather dust in attics, be used as shoeshine rags. Who knows? (FE, 192.)

However, as in *Abeng*, this project of retracing the history of resistance is archaeological. The narrator explains that “[l]ong before the costumed tragedy of the Civil War, rebellion was a fact. These rebels concealed themselves in caves, swamps, hidden places called forts. [---]. Archaeologists found gun flints, pieces of glass bottles, shards of pottery, animal bones. No one can tell

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<sup>100</sup> The nickname given to Native American troops fighting in the Civil War. Later it became a name for all-black regiments in the U.S. army. The name is sometimes used as a generic term for all African-American soldiers.

where the people went” (FE, 109).<sup>101</sup> The theme is echoed in the composition of the novel: like the history of resistance, *Free Enterprise* is itself a tapestry of pieces and voices.

The title of the Carville section in *Free Enterprise* is called “Oral History” highlighting the narrator’s dismissal of written history.<sup>102</sup> The narrator develops the theme of oral history further by introducing Mary Shadd Carey (1823-1893), one of the historical characters in *Free Enterprise*. Carey was an abolitionist and known to be the first female publisher of color in Northern States. Moreover, she was a first woman of color to obtain a degree in Law. Carey had her own newspaper “Provincial Freeman” and she founded schools for colored children.<sup>103</sup> In the novel, she is a school teacher Mary Ellen meets. Her teaching is based on the appreciation of speech:

Miss Carey, the schoolmistress, had each of her students memorize, for recitation on command, a narrative in its entirety.

“Books are fragile things,” she explained. “What they contain can easily be lost. We must become talking books; talk it on, like Africans, children. Talk it on.” (FE, 211).

Carey’s character, once again, underlines the narrator’s doubts about written history by reinforcing the themes of story-telling and oral histories. In addition, by giving a voice to her in *Free Enterprise*, Cliff highlights the feminist and anti-racist perspectives of American history. I suggest that phrases such as “books are fragile things” and “we must become talking books” (FE, 211) conceptualize the historical consciousness of Cliff’s writing. The past is fragile, easy to distort. It is memory with which the colonial episteme can be surmounted.<sup>104</sup>

Like the Clare Savage novels, *Free Enterprise* is also a structurally fragmented novel where several storylines are intertwined. As noted above, Annie’s youth begins to take shape through the memories she tells to Rachel in Mississippi. This basic storyline is interrupted by the sections depicting Mary Ellen’s life after the raid, Captain Parsons’ story, Quasheba’s story, stories told in Carville, and by the story of two female cousins, Alice and Clover Hooper desperately in love with one another. A significant part of the novel consists of the letters different characters write to one another. The epistolary form and story-telling structure, as Nada Elia explains, increase “the sense of orality that pervades the book, creating at once a feeling of intimacy and reproducing the African story-telling tradition which preserves communal history”

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101 The history of resistance is also chronologically fragmented in the novel. The symbols and characters of different periods are connected to the story line describing the events of the end of nineteenth century. For example, Mary Ellen meets a mysterious “hologrammatical man” whose “unborn eyes” has “herself reflected in them” (FE, 76). It turns out that this man is Malcolm X, a famous civil rights activist of the 1960s. Moreover, Annie, whose connections to Jewish culture are clear, refers to a motto *Arbeit macht frei* which, decades later, came to symbolize the holocaust (FE, 202).

102 I agree with Bénédicte Ledent who interprets that *Free Enterprise* posits identity as “constructed, told, spoken, not simply found” (Ledent 2000 79). Moreover, Annie’s state of exile is an important catalyst in her struggles towards an identity, as Ledent argues. She further notes that this kind of home-in-exile theme is not new in Caribbean literature where exile has so often been a vehicle to self-awareness (see Ledent 2000 79-80).

103 Carey also supported John Brown’s abolitionist struggles.

104 MacDonald-Smythe calls *Free Enterprise* a “talking book” (MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 156) connecting it to the African American literary tradition of vernacular syntax (see Gates 1986). For more on the re-interpretations of history in *Free Enterprise* see MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 156-69.

(Elia 2001, 73). Letters and memories, whether individual or collective, construct an assemblage of histories with which the subaltern characters are able to make their stories known. I suggest that the assemblage of stories reflects the novel's ethos towards the transnational sense of community. It is clear that *Free Enterprise* does not re-write Caribbean history as much as the Clare Savage novels, but it does attempt to connect the Caribbean to the transnational cultural movements of ideas, identities, and resistance. Cliff's "embroidery" of stories is a way to overcome the institutionalized "amnesia" caused by the "winners who record and transform" history, to quote Myriam Chancy (Chancy 1997, 178).

Thus, it seems obvious that the issue of "otherness" in *Free Enterprise* is posed differently from that in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*. In *Free Enterprise*, otherness is not an individual experience; it is collectively shared. The novel builds symbolic bridges between different groups like the storytellings in Carville or John Brown's raid linking different kinds of people equally connected to the acts of rebellion. The narrator of *Free Enterprise* does not aim to define histories and identity formation particular to the Caribbean but concentrates on the transnationally shared experience of otherness. It is not the particularity of 'my history' which needs to be addressed but to see what 'we have in common' as marginalized peoples. I suggest that *Free Enterprise* is a novel of solidarity creating a forum for voices whose intersectional identities have been rendered unrecognizable by the more essentialist identity political movements. *Free Enterprise* pinpoints the complexity of various categories of identity and their social relations, as Leslie McCall envisions in her theorizations of intersectionality (see McCall 2005, 1771-3). As Alice and Clover Hooper are privileged by their class position, they are marginalized by their sexual orientation, while Mary Ellen is marginalized by her skin-color but is still privileged by her economic status. They both rebel against the oppositional logic of central versus marginal and embody the logic of fluidity, typical of Cliff's writing, whether in community building or identity construction.

Alongside oral history, intersectionality, and transnationality, the themes of slavery and capitalism are central in *Free Enterprise*. The narrator does not tire of emphasizing the intertwining connections between economical and racial power. As Elleke Boehmer writes, the colonial rule "had a genius for fashioning moral ideas which matched their economic needs" (Boehmer 1995, 36). John Brown's envisioned communist utopias in Africa are countered by Mary Ellen's praise for free entrepreneurship. Even though slavery is presented as a product of capitalism in the ethos of the novel, John Brown's and Mary Ellen's dialogue epitomizes the multifaceted nature of the issue. Mary Ellen criticizes Brown's idealized views about ex-slaves being free of, or somehow beyond, the mechanisms of capitalism. She connects social and collective success to economic success and claims that people of color should not be isolated from the conditions of modern society, free entrepreneurship, and the influence provided by property. Mary Ellen thinks that a totally equal society beyond economical realities is a utopia. For her, denying the possibility for freed slaves to gain wealth puts them on a pedestal in a way that itself is a mechanism of oppression. Later Mary Ellen explains to Annie:

We almost fell out over his devotion to communism, his notion of an African state as a christo-utopia, a heaven on earth for colored folks. [---]. I objected to his notion immediately. Dammit, our people knew capitalism intimately, historically. [---]. I reminded him that in Africa commerce came easily to us, there were no communist states, no states of noble savagery. [---]. And I accused him of pedestrializing the African, a practise as potentially degrading, and damaging, as enslavement. [---]. I worried, as I told him, that he saw our people's experience as somehow ennobling; that we were *better* than capitalism, since we had been crucified by it. Were we now to roll back the stone and ascend from a netherworld into utopia? (FE, 143.)

The name “free enterprise”, like “abeng” being a horn with two usages, is a poly-semantic signifier referring simultaneously to slavery and oppressive capitalism, as well as the actual possibility for oppressed people to gain prosperity. Moreover, it refers to the business run by Mary Ellen, and the enterprise Brown, Mary Ellen, Annie and many others fashioned in order to help the slaves.<sup>105</sup> The name clarifies that capitalism, profit-seeking, and entrepreneurship are more complicated issues than simply imperialist imports. For Mary Ellen, capitalism is a reality which might offer a way to rescue enslaved people from poverty or noble savagery. In this sense *Free Enterprise* is not ready to reject the ideal of American liberalism.

*Free Enterprise* considers capitalism to be intertwined in many ways with ethics and aesthetics. One of the questions the novel raises concerns the problem of representation. The narrator questions whether slavery be a subject of art, and as such, considered beautiful. Mary Ellen turns against capitalism in a chapter discussing the relationship between art and slavery. In her old age, she meets Alice Hooper, a rich lady and a hostess of elite societies. Alice has bought a painting by J.M.W. Turner called “Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – a Typhoon Coming on” (1840). In the novel, Mary Ellen has been invited to comment on the painting which literally depicts how the slavers throw overboard the colored bodies as the storm rises. The stormy sea in front of the ship is filled with arms and legs, and these fragmented body parts are framed by the fiery red sky. The bodies are thrown overboard before the storm in anticipation of insurance money. Mary Ellen starts to feel sick as she remembers the companies which granted these insurances (FE, 73) noting that neither New England nor the Northern States are innocent in the matter of slavery: “Too many New England fortunes [---] rest in the enterprise of slavery, in one way or another” (FE, 77). When one of the guests starts admiring the colors of the painting, Mary Ellen exits.

Turner’s “Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – a Typhoon Coming on” has been widely discussed by postcolonial scholars. Mainly, I refer to Paul Gilroy’s interpretation in his influential study *The Black Atlantic* (1993). According to Gilroy several of Turner’s paintings of slaveships, the sea, and seafaring depict the transnational culture of the “New World” innovati-

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<sup>105</sup> The free enterprise also refers to a network called “The Underground Railway”, a secret system for helping slaves to escape from the Slave States. It is not an actual railway but a network of people, secret pathways, encoded messages and so on fabricated to transport run-away slaves to freedom. Both John Brown and Mary Ellen Pleasant are historically known as operators of the Underground Railway. It is suspected that Mary Ellen’s hotel was a secret safe house in the railway-system. See more <http://www.freedomcenter.org/underground-railroad/>. This network epitomizes the ambiguous nature of the title *Free Enterprise*.

vely. Gilroy argues, contradicting the narrator in *Free Enterprise*, that Turner's painting is a useful image "not only for its self-conscious moral power and the striking way that it aims directly for the sublime in its invocation of racial terror, commerce, and England's ethico-political degradation" (Gilroy 1996, 16). Gilroy goes further by claiming that Turner in particular succeeds in representing the global mobility and transatlantic trade. On the contrary, the Turner section<sup>106</sup> in *Free Enterprise* suggests that slavery cannot be aesthetized, collected as a valuable, or merely represented without critique. Later, Alice, feeling guilty after having invested money in something depicting the horrors of slavery, asks Mary Ellen: "Did the money, my money, paid to the art dealer on my behalf for the Turner constitute the dealer's profiting off the trade?...Am I also, given the painting is an investment, guilty?" (FE, 77-8).<sup>107</sup> The narrator of *Free Enterprise* demands that the reader thinks about ethical questions associated with multi-national and multi-corporated trade. In the novel, it is slavery, but it could also be a more current machinery of global trade which violates human rights. The question which lingers in the reader's mind concerns 'my participation, my profit, my advantages gained on slavery'. Indeed, in the end of the novel the narrator states sarcastically that the Turner painting hangs in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. She addresses the reader directly by saying "Go see it. Take the kids" (FE, 180).

The ship in Turner's painting is the slave ship *Zong*, which already appeared in *Abeng* (A, 164), and which highlights the linearity of all the three novels. The painting in *Free Enterprise* becomes a symbol referring to different modes of representation – particularly to those of "official history". It encapsulates how the violence of the past can be ennobled, aestheticized. *Ekphrasis* is the term used in literary studies to describe visual works of art in literature. According to Mary Lou Emery, it "appears to represent the representation itself" thereby allowing critical commentary "on the politics of representation in particular visual discourse" (Emery 1997, 264).<sup>108</sup> Since ekphrasis represents the act of representation itself, it has the possibility, according to Emery, to stage something outside the fictional real. It disturbs the narrative discourse by enabling an analysis of the process of representation, for example its ideological or political agendas. It may tell a story that the dominant narrative cannot (re)present: Emery's example of this is a woman's denied subjectivity. (See Emery 1997, 263-5.) I argue that Turner's painting in *Free Enterprise* is an ekphrasis in Emery's political sense of the term. It brings forth questions concerning both the representation of slavery, and the blurring of Black history. As an ekphrasis, it stages the violence and grief the dominant forms of representing are unable to

106 It is important that the name of the chapter including the Turner section is called *Provenance* which means 1. origin, source, and 2. the history of ownership of a valued object or work of art or literature.

107 Antonia MacDonald-Smythe explains that Alice's self-reflexivity "affords Cliff a way out to the demonization of the white woman" (MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 163).

108 The term ekphrasis comes from the Greek *ekphrazein* meaning "speak out", "to tell in full". (See Emery 1997, 264).



describe.<sup>109</sup> It is an intermedial narrative technique of metatextuality which Sue E. Houchins has called as “textuality of silence” (Houchins 2004).

Emery utilizes ekphrasis in her analysis of Caribbean women’s writing revising this literary means which “has long been associated with epic narratives of conquest and empire-building and with the construction of masculine identities” (Emery 1997, 262). In postcolonial women’s writing, it functions as a means which renders visible the politics involved in representing. Ekphrasis is the “radical other” that “crosses from narrative flow” and “exhausts the colonizing capacity” by “repossessing the meaning of possession” (Emery 1997, 271). In *Free Enterprise*, Turner’s painting is an act of repossessing the memory of slavery, thus encapsulating the theme of the novel. According to Emery, Cliff’s narration employs the trope of ekphrasis in three different ways.<sup>110</sup> First, it renders visible the ideological structures of dominating visual culture and examines its discursive powers. Second, it reverses the trope and exposes its colonizing effects, and third, it leads the reader towards alternative modes of representation and thus to new kind of imagination (Emery 1997, 272). Thus the Turner ekphrasis in *Free Enterprise* reflects the very ethos of written history questioned in the novel. However, as the painting represents for Gilroy the shifting spaces of the *Middle Passage* illustrating the way modernity can be rethought, we can also draw another conclusion.<sup>111</sup> It might also be an ekphrasis representing transnationality and diaspora. The painting itself becomes an object of polyphony in the novel, similar to abeng-horn, representing the transatlantic movement, global trade, slavery and human trafficking, as well as diaspora and imperialism.

The discussion about the Turner’s painting emphasizes Cliff’s distrust of narration in the politics of representation. The theme is expressed in many ways in *Free Enterprise*. Alice Hooper’s cousin, Marian “Clover” Hooper is a professional photographer.<sup>112</sup> As an upper class elite wife, she considers herself an outsider in her own life, and fills her inner void with her photographs. With Alice’s help she photographs different kinds of marginal(ized) people, for example the members of “Buffalo Soldiers” regiment. These pictures are sent in the novel to the noted sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens as models for his Civil War Memorial on 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts all black Regiment lead by Colonel Shaw, known as the Shaw memorial. However

109 Respectively Sue E. Houchins has argued that Cliff uses Turner’s painting in *Free Enterprise* as a means of describing something verbally indescribable. The story told with the visual art is so violent that it cannot be verbalized. Furthermore, Houchins interprets that the body parts floating in the sea in Turner’s painting become a metaphor of the black woman’s subjectivity fragmented in diaspora. (Houchins 2004).

110 Emery examines in her study especially *No Telephone to Heaven*. However, I think that *Free Enterprise* is the novel which highlights this trope in particular. Therefore I will apply Emery’s visionary ideas to it.

111 Gilroy 1996, 16-7. See more on Gilroy on Turner pp. 13-17.

112 Clover Hooper is also one of the historical characters of the novel, although her story is told anew. Marian “Clover” Adams (nee Hooper) was the third daughter of a rich upper class family from Boston’s high society. In 1872 she married the historian Henry Adams, who was a grandson of former president of United States, John Quincy Adams. Marian conducted a lively social life together with Henry, and she was the hostess of an intellectual salon in Washington. In the meantime Marian became the first noted female photographer in America. However, after her father’s death in 1885 she slid into depression and committed a suicide later that year. The story of Marian and Henry Adams has inspired lots of books and stories despite the fact that Henry Adams destroyed all the letters he had ever had from Marian. For example, it is said that Marian inspired Henry James’s novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Nowadays she is mostly known by the famous Adams Memorial at her grave, a mysterious and allegorical sculpture, commissioned by Henry Adams – from August Saint-Gaudens.



Clover's pictures get lost, and the artist does not consider them worth the effort of looking up. Moreover, Saint-Gaudens refuses the help of Sergeant Lewis Douglass, one of the survivors of 54<sup>th</sup> regiment. (FE, 162-3). Lewis' plea to Saint-Gaudens is that "[i]t is important to me that my comrades be depicted to a man, individually, and not as background to our beloved colonel" (FE, 162). Saint-Gaudens, falsely, replies to this plea: "I am an Irishman, and so honor your caution with regarding to becoming 'background'" (FE, 163). The sculptor is also provided the late Colonel Shaw's saddle as a model for his Memorial. While Clover is devastated by the loss of her pictures, called as the "only memento of that time" (FE, 164), Saint-Gaudens takes "the utmost" care of the saddle, soaping and rubbing it "religiously" (FE, 171). Moreover, when his design of the Memorial is ready he describes it as follows:

I have limited the design of the piece of portraits of sixteen soldiers, Negroes all, of course, in low relief, bayonets pointing up, marching in front and behind the Colonel, in much higher relief, on horseback. (FE, 171).

Canonized art is unable to depict the actions of "the other". Mementoes are lost or dumped at the background.

Isabel Hoving analyzes Clover's efforts to photograph marginalized people in *Free Enterprise* as an attempt to "bridge the gap" between herself and them, but people refuse to be photographed, the pictures get lost, or they are considered insignificant (Hoving 2001, 250). According to Hoving visibility does not allow interaction, or offer a dialogue in *Free Enterprise* (Hoving 2001, 250). It is storytelling that matters, as in a section where Clover wants to take a picture of an ex-slave woman living in the streets. She does not allow her picture to be taken but makes Clover hear her story instead (FE 86-95). Metaphorically, this ex-slave woman calls herself Scheherezade referring to *Thousand and One Nights*. According to Hoving, "Cliff suggests that merely visual models are not very helpful in establishing the interaction needed to construct a multiracial Caribbean (or American) identity" (Hoving 2001, 250-1). I would like to argue that is not the mere visibility that Cliff's narrative distrusts, but the politics included in representation; the modes, the language, the tradition, the convention, in the other words, the machinery of institutionalized art forms as discourse imbued with power.<sup>113</sup>

In *Free Enterprise*, the omniscient narration still dominant in *Abeng* is deconstructed into multiple voices and perspectives. As the boundary between fact and fiction is dissolved in *Free Enterprise*, written history proves to be only one possible narrative legitimized by the dominant knowledge-power episteme. The novel offers a contrapuntal reading of the history of slavery highlighting women's activity and the shared resistance of several people of minorities. The narrator's distrust in the politics of representation discussed above is juxtaposed with her distrust in written forms of history. Oral histories, on the contrary, manage to resist the

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<sup>113</sup> For the relations of visual presentation and story-telling in *Free Enterprise* see also Ledent 2000, 84-5. I agree with Ledent's notion that the mere move from visual to vocal is not unproblematic either. Ledent follows Iain Chambers argument that "the focus on the oral fails to register speechlessness or imposed silence, which, through usually interpreted as sign of madness, can also be a marker of agency" (Ledent 2000, 84).

“historical amnesia” of subaltern subjects. Transnational resistance offers a base for the sense of community to those oppressed in different ways. The journey towards identity in *Free Enterprise* is no longer geographically situated but moved to a transnational space. My journey with Cliff’s novels is carried on into a further analysis on the theme of dialectics between the institutionalized story, that is to say the history of modernity, and the Caribbean counter-story that is re-written in her novels.

### 3. Colonialism, Language, and the Imperial *Mythos* of Modernity

James Ferguson argues that the idea of modernity is based on several constitutive narratives, which have also affected postcolonial theorizing (Ferguson 2005, 166-7). Of these, he argues the most powerful narrative is the one which effectively transformed a spatialized global hierarchy into a temporalized historical sequence. According to this 'developmentalist' idea of modernity, poor countries were not simply at the bottom, they were at the beginning (Ferguson 2005, 167-8). Interestingly, Ferguson argues that we must decompose the narratives of modernity in order to think about hierarchy and history beyond developmentalism, as people lose the faith in developmental time (Ferguson 2005, 177). I have mentioned earlier Cliff's dialectical narrative technique, which, while deconstructing the hegemonic story of colonialism, constructs counter-stories that rebel against the single-voiced view of history. In general, this chapter examines how Cliff's novels deconstruct the foundational narratives of European colonial modernity. I will start from a general overview of the rise of racial and sexual empiricist categorizations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and then examine how the effects of Western colonial modernity in the Caribbean are questioned in Cliff's novels. This includes a detailed study of the omniscient narration in *Abeng*, paying particular attention to how the novel deconstructs the epistemological imperialism of colonial knowledge, "white mythology"<sup>114</sup>, which leads to the last subchapter focusing on the binary configuration between language and speech in *No Telephone to Heaven*. I argue that *No Telephone to Heaven* uses rebellious speech acts as tools to counter the hegemonic language imbued with white mythologies.

Consequently, the following section examines the intertwined nature of colonialism and modernity. More specifically, my aim is to consider the narratives of modernity, namely those of imperialism and hierarchical thinking, as 'universal mythologies', obscuring their own contingency. I will examine how the universalizing idea of teleology, inherent in modernity, plural and

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<sup>114</sup> White mythology is a concept used by Jacques Derrida. For further definitions, see section 3.3.

ambivalent within Cliff's writing. Thus, in this chapter, I will consider modernity as a Western, humanistic process, which gave birth to ideas such as autonomous subjectivity, rationality, empiricism, and national thinking, thereby categorizing societies (*natio*) according to developmentalist ideology. However, I will also consider modernity as an *episteme*, which legitimized concepts and practises such as imperialism, slavocracy, and the pseudo-scientific categorizations of race and sexuality. I will argue that the imperial *mythos* of modernity was based on the idea of an individual, autonomous subjectivity which needed the racialized 'other' to define its shape. These mechanisms of modernity are rendered visible in Cliff's novels in order to invite critical responses from the reader.

### 3.1. Modern Empiricism and the Categorizations of Race and Sexuality

Colonialism and imperialism are connected to the nineteenth century process of modernity. They co-evolved with processes such as industrialization, popular culture, privatization, and urbanization, but also with empiricism, positivist ideas of culture and later Darwinism. James Ferguson defines elements of modernity such as industrial economies, scientific technologies, liberal democratic politics, nuclear families, and secular worldviews as elements modernity, which were thought necessary for the development of colonized countries so that they could "take their place as equals in the worldwide family of nations" (Ferguson 2005, 167). However, modernity also gave birth to the idea of modern individual subjectivity. It has sometimes been seen as a paradox that postcolonial criticism, wanting to reject Western ideas, has drawn upon the very ideas of the Western humanistic tradition, namely liberty, freedom, individuality, self-determination etc (see e.g. Baumann 1998). Recently this paradox has been provocatively addressed by Elizabeth Povinelli who argues that "freedom is not a good orienting device for subaltern social struggle" (Povinelli 2005, 146). She claims that freedom "sets into place a specific vector of responsibility and accountability for the harms of given social life [sic] away from those who profit toward those who suffer" (Povinelli 2005, 146). Moreover, freedom "aligns itself to the worst ex-cesses of capitalism" and "reduces possibilities for social elaboration and social critique" (Povinelli 2005, 146). I will now examine how modern subjectivity and the related ideas of 'individuality' and 'freedom' were constructed *within a developmentalist, colonial episteme* and how the epistemology of colonial modernity is countered in the novels of Michelle Cliff.

By definition, a modern individual subject is free. The freedom of this individual was defined and sustained through the complex categorizations of the not-free, Other. Scientific racism was one of the tools used to identify "others". Whiteness was not defined as "race" by the dominant white society, because race was something not-white, deviating from the perceived 'normality' of whiteness. This idea of 'race' has been supported by Western science during the nineteenth century which, in the context of positivism and scientism, considered

racial characteristics to be psycho-pathological. Together with social Darwinism, scientific fields such as phrenology and eugenics gave birth to a discourse of modern, scientific racism. During the nineteenth century, these pseudo-scientific discourses tried to prove that certain personal characteristics can be observed from visible differences, such as proclivity to criminality, loose morality, prostitution, sexual deviance, violence, et cetera.<sup>115</sup>

Psycho-pathology evolved in connection to other generic theories such as Montesquieu's meteorological climate theory and Carl von Linné's system of classification. Moreover, older Christian theology, which had conceptualized the "Great Chain of Being" claiming that the various creatures of the world formed a chain, ranking from highest (God) to lowest (Inanimate matter), influenced scientific racism as it was applied to *Homo sapiens* (Ferguson 2005, 168-70). Racial psycho-pathology is clearly present in *Abeng*. When Clare is punished after taking a gun and accidentally shooting Miss Mattie's bull, both Kitty and Boy accuse her race. While Kitty thinks that "it was whiteness – and the arrogance which usually accompanied *that state* which had finally showed through her daughter's soul" (A, 148), Boy blames "blackness" which must have been "*the cause* of her daughter's actions" (A, 149). Genes can instigate causes and states. Clare embodies once again the very racial binary she is trying to resist while facing the stereotypes posed for biracial people.<sup>116</sup> The novel reflects how deeply these kinds of ideas are rooted in colonized reality.

As Clare's case attests, the power of genes penetrates even the familial relationships. The ideology of scientific racism produced the terms and legitimized the framework through which the 'other' was encountered and became acknowledged. Most importantly, it appeared as a matrix of rationalization which justified the marginalization and the limited freedom of those considered 'others'. Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Hobbes considered Reason to be the basis for organizing the society. The idea that a society should serve its citizens substituted the earlier conceptions about citizens as subjects within a society. A rational citizen was to have the freedom to increase his wealth and to receive compensation for his work.<sup>117</sup> As postcolonial critics have noted, these Enlightenment ideas form a paradox particularly in the context of French and British imperial slave-economies (e.g. Hall 1992, 312-14 or McClintock 1995, 22-48). It is important to reflect, who are excluded or marginalized from the "social-contracts", and who were considered to have the right to be

115 See for scientific discourses of race Dyer 1997, 15-40; for race and empiricism Bernasconi & Lott 2000, vii-xviii; Gilman 1985 & 1986, Hall 1992b, McClintock 1995, Somerville 2000, 21-5 and for race and enlightenment thought Ashcroft 2009, 56-60. Cornel West offers an extensive genealogy for modern racism, see West 2002. Psycho-pathological discourses are in many ways visible in European realist and naturalist literature. A villain was always dark, ugly, hairy, frightening or ill-featured as Abel Magwitch in *Great Expectations* (1860) by Charles Dickens which is one of the central intertexts in Cliff's novels.

116 See also Dagbovie 2006, 95. Dagbovie widely analyses Clare's ambivalent position as a biracial subject.

117 John Locke's ideas on value and property are published in *Two Treaties of Government* (1689) which has been a ground-breaking work in the Western philosophical tradition. For more on Locke see also Strachan 2002, 67-8, and for an analysis on Lockean impact on colonialist thinking see Ashcroft 2009, 79-81.

compensated.<sup>118</sup> Cliff's narrator in *Abeng* describes the violence and oppression which fell on African-Caribbeans even after the abolition. She portrays the brutal events on the eve of abolition on Judge Savage's plantation from Judge's point of view:

These people were not equipped to cope with the responsibilities of freedom. These people were Africans. Their parameters of behavior were out of the range of civilized men. Their lives obviously of less value. They had been brought here for one purpose, and one purpose only – and this was about to be removed. [---] [T]he dark people existed on another, lower level of being. He believed all this absolutely. And held that among these people life was cheap, and death did not matter. His conclusion was far from original among his own kind: At that moment these people were his property, and they were therefore his to burn. [---] [I]t should be noted that this was not an isolated act on the eve of African freedom in Jamaica. (A, 39-40, emphasis added.)

Although slavery was abolished in the British Commonwealth in 1838, many of the problems caused by slavery remained.

Stuart Hall has analysed the concept of modernity as a Western mythology. According to Hall, our conceptualizations of “east” and “west” “have never been free of myth and fantasy”, and even today are not “primarily ideas about place and geography” (Hall 1992b, 276). The concepts describe more likely a type of society, a level of development. “West”, according to Hall, is a discourse including processes such as urbanization, economy, politics, and culture. It is identical to that of the word “modern” (Hall 1992b, 277). Moreover, “West” is a stereotype, a tool with which we categorize societies. It provides a “model of comparison” and operates as a “criteria of evaluation against which other societies are ranked” making itself the desired standard. Thus, it produces a certain kind of knowledge and functions as an ideology (Hall 1992b, 277). As ideology it determines what is left outside, marginalized as “the rest”.<sup>119</sup> This, I claim, is analogous to the ways in which Cliff's novels present the “colonial”. Therefore, if the colonial order of things is conceptualized as an ideology, it may also be countered with de-colonizing re-conceptualizations. In Cliff's novels these modes of conceptualizations are put into dialogue which provides the reader with an insight into their interconnected nature. For example, the narrator of *No Telephone to Heaven* describes how Jamaican movie goers mixed their local folkloric trickster-figures with Hollywood-heroes:

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118 Stuart Hall has analyzed Lockean thinking from the postcolonial point of view. Hall writes: “‘In the beginning all the world was America’. He meant by this that the world (i.e. the West) had evolved from a stage very much like that discovered in America – untilled, undeveloped and uncivilized. America was the ‘childhood of mankind, Locke claimed, and Indians should be classed with ‘children, idiots and illiterates because of their inability to reason in abstract, speculative...terms” (Hall 1992b, 312).

119 Once again it should be noted that discourse about the “west” is not merely a form of oppression. Even though it uses ideological power, it also produces knowledge, as Foucault argues. Hall reminds us that the idea of “west” became productive, once produced. “It became both the organizing factor in a system of global power relations and the organizing concept or term in a whole way of thinking and speaking” (Hall 1992b, 278).

Jamaicans came in droves to see the pictures, to glimpse the world beyond the island, lose themselves, whether in theaters or in country gathering places - the picturegoers carried the images away with them, transforming them, eager always for more. In the streets and in the yards, Brer Anansi, about whom their grandparents taught them, Rhyging, about whom their mothers warned them, Sasabonsam, whose familiar image terrorized them, mixed in their games with Wyatt Earp, Legs Diamond, Tarzan the Apeman, and King Kong. (NTH, 93.)

It is important to notice that also “the rest”, or “the other” shapes the colonial ideals, but it is not a passive receiver.<sup>120</sup>

According to Hall, Western knowledge concerning the “other” became constituted through knowledge drawn from classical mythologies, tales, biblical sources, or traveller’s tales including even the vulgar and grotesque imageries. The explorers “found what the legend said they would find” (Hall 1992b, 298). Hall adds that “this astonishing mixture of fact and fantasy which constituted late medieval ‘knowledge’ of the other worlds” provided the cultural framework “through which the peoples, places and things of the New World were seen, described and represented” (Hall 1992b, 298-99).<sup>121</sup> These frameworks also occur in *Abeng*, as the narrator explains:

When he left on his journeys across the curve of the globe, Columbus carried with him several books in which the white Christian European imagination had carved images of the beings in unknown and unexplored lands. Dog-headed. Beings with human torsos. Winged people who could not fly. Beings with one foot growing out of the tops of their heads, their only living function to create shade for themselves in the hot tropical sun. People who ate human flesh. All monsters. All inhuman. The people the explorers and philosophers of exploration envisioned would inhabit the ends of the earth. (A, 78.)

The colonial discourse is not only based on fantastic archives, it also draws and maintains stereotypes. Both Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall analyze the stereotyping quality of the colonial discourse. According to Bhabha, it is often ambivalent and controversial: something described as dirty or vulgar can in other instances be turned into idealized, eroticised or even fetishized.<sup>122</sup> For Hall the stereotyping idealizations regarding the colonized are merely a form of oppression. According to Hall, sexuality is a powerful element in the fantasy the West constructed about the other. Open sexuality, nakedness, and the beauty of the women are belonging to colonial stereotypes (Hall 1992b, 300-2). Thus, as I will demonstrate later,

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<sup>120</sup> In this sense I agree with Simon Gikandi who reminds us that “English culture does not arise from an ‘internal and intrinsic’ dynamic”, but on the contrary, those things often considered to be originary moments of the national culture, “or rather its key constitutive moments, are already inhabited by black subjects” (Gikandi 1996, 81).

<sup>121</sup> For more on these fantasies see Hall 1992b, 297-9. Depictions of barbarians and of mythical places such as El Dorado and Garden of Eden by Ovid, Horace, and Herodotus are in the archive which provided this framework. Gikandi similarly argues that a network of fantastic tales of the colonial travellers preceded the encounters with the other peoples who thus became to be understood through Western consciousness. The strange space was domesticated accordant with Western ideologies. (Gikandi 1996, 89). Peter Hulme has widely studied colonial encounters and their representations in the Caribbean context. See Hulme 1986.

<sup>122</sup> See for Bhabha’s considerations on the stereotyping nature of colonial discourse, Bhabha 1995, 75-84.

the re-claiming of female sexuality and turning it into rebellious purposes is inherent in Cliff's rebuttal of colonial thinking.

The idealizing and sexualizing stereotypes are often present in the colonialist, or even recent neocolonialist depictions of the Caribbean, as Mimi Sheller proves in her study *Consuming the Caribbean* (2003). These Utopian, yet sexualized imageries, whether colonial or touristic, reflect the Western desire towards the "Other". Cliff's narrators are keen to parody the utopistic discourse of "otherness". In *Free Enterprise*, as the patients in Carville share their stories, a Hawaiian man tells a story about Captain Cook's arrival to his native island. The story is told, according to story-telling traditions, as though it were eye-witnessed by the teller. The parodic aspect becomes clear as the stereotyping discourse is turned against the intruders who emerge as strange and exotic:

"They were sitting on the beach. Their longboats, plain of decoration, unlike our own canoes [---] were pulled up against the shore, which they called, we found out later, the Strand. This comforted them, it seemed, and satisfied their desire to christen everything anew – even us." [---].

"Each of them had a thick piece of red flesh in his hands; red juice ran down each chin, matting their beards, attracting sandflies. We thought they were chewing on an enemy, celebrating as we might." (FE, 45-6.)

"Our mistake. They were merely refreshing themselves and cooling off, with watermelon they'd taken from a garden near shore [---]."

"Be as it may, we were relieved, and laughed. [---]. "We went further in our joking – but kept it to ourselves. We called them *akua waha 'ula 'ula* – the 'red mouthed gods.' They were no more gods than we were, but seemed unsure of that." (FE, 47.)

The stereotyping 'colonial gaze' is parodically turned against the colonizer, as the highly praised Captain Cook is depicted as a simple man whose "longboats were plain of decorations, unlike our own canoes – or those of Maori, Mayan, Arawak, Carib, Aztec, Ashanti, Yoruba, Samoan, Inuit" (FE, 45), and who brought the syphilis to the island (FE, 49). The list of native peoples emphasizes the multiplicity of the 'rest' which is often homogenized by the "west". As Stuart Hall argues, according to the ideological discourse of "the West and the Rest", the Rest becomes monolithic, defined as everything the West is not. "It is represented as absolutely, essentially, different, *other*: The Other" (Hall 1992b, 308).

In *Abeng*, the colonial fantasies are called, appropriating Joseph Conrad's novel, as the "heart of darkness". It is the heart of darkness which reduces all "others", from Jews to Native Americans, into frameworks created by ideological discourse. The narrator in the novel explains:

In part the Europeans created these fantastic images to render the actual inhabitants harmless. [---]. Imagined inhabitants will have few – if any – individual characteristics. They will have bizarre features by which they are joined to one another, but none which are specific to themselves. The primary feature is their difference from white and Christian Europeans. It is *that* heart of darkness which has imagined them less than human. Which has limited their movement. The fantasies of that heart infected the Native tribes of North America with smallpox and with syphilis.



Destroyed the language of the Mayans and the Incas. Brought Africans in chains to the New World and worked them to death. Killed nine million people including six million Jews, in the death camps of Europe. This is one connection. These are but few of the heart's excesses. (A, 78-9.)

Here the colonial discourse is encountered with violent, accusing words thus dismissing its authoritative power.<sup>123</sup>

Elleke Boehmer uses the above-mentioned term "Colonial gaze" to describe the organizing power of colonialist narrative. She explains that "the gaze was made manifest in the activities of investigation, examination, inspection, peeping, poring over, which were accompaniments to the colonial penetrations of the country" (Boehmer 1995, 71).<sup>124</sup> This urge to investigate and categorize was related to modern empiricism. Colonial gaze also tended to misread and simplify the complicated events and traditions along the lines of the developmentalist narrative sustaining white supremacy. The very rationality which gave birth to the "Other" anthropologized and scrutinized the "Other" empirically. Many such phenomena, which were unfit to Western categories, were nonetheless forced into these niches, e.g. various rituals could be misinterpreted as cannibalism or physical appearance could render colonized subjects animals. According to Boehmer, early eighteenth century scientists, scholars, and explorers "sought to establish natural orders, measures, and chains of succession which embrace the natural world." [---] It was "taken for granted that the apex of all such pyramids and chains was located in Europe" (Boehmer 1995, 84). These ideas were also, in many cases, supported by Western philosophy and aesthetics.<sup>125</sup> The narrator of *No Telephone to Heaven* demonstrates the perseverance of these categorizations in the minds of the colonized, in this case in Boy Savage:

123 The different types of colonial discourse are extensively analyzed in the widely recognized study by David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire. Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (1993). Spurr finds 11 types of discourses which were used in colonialist language: surveillance, appropriation, aestheticization, classification, debasement, negation, affirmation, idealization, insubstantialization, naturalization, and eroticization (See Spurr 1993). Idealization, eroticization, and romanticization were widely in use in the contexts concerning Caribbean coloniality (and are still recycled for the tourist industry). Native Americans, whether in the Caribbean or North America, were often subjected to these types of discourses as childlike, innocent, nature-friendly, peaceful, and noble. A number of scholars studying Native American issues have paid attention to the lack of vital and contemporary descriptions of American First Nations, and these nations are called "museumized". Simon Gikandi calls this type of descriptions of 'noble savagery' 'ethnoeroticism' (Gikandi 1996, 106).

124 It is important to note that the gaze was also gendered, a masculine gaze: the categorized 'Other' was often not only sexualized but also feminized. The virgin land needed to be penetrated, examined. Gikandi analyzes colonial travel fantasies as sexual desires displaced to the feminized, 'virgin' landscape. He emphasizes the "inevitable association of the black body and nature" which defines and strengthens the masculinity of the colonial gaze (Gikandi 1996, 110-2). Cliff's also tends to feminize the Caribbean in her decolonial narration, but these represent a *feminist* textual rebellion rather than the process of feminization. Cliff's feminist counter-discourse envisions active female resistance, and resisting characters such as Nanny of the Maroons. This active femininity rather deconstructs the colonialist stereotypes than supports them.

125 Racist ideas in Western canonized philosophy and aesthetics have been analyzed roughly from the 1980s onwards. Henry Louis Gates Jr. was among the first to re-read Western philosophers such as Hume, Kant, and Hegel from the racial point of view (see Gates 1986). For more recent readings about 'the idea of race' see Bernasconi and Lott 2000.

Boy wondered. A lesson from the third form on the history of Jamaica sprang to mind: mulatto, offspring of African and white; sambo, offspring of African and mulatto; quadroon, offspring of mulatto and white; mestee, offspring of quadroon and white; mesteeena, offspring of mestee and white. Am I remembering it right? He asked himself. (NTH, 56).

People from other cultures were ranked, as Boehmer explains, “on the basis of their difference from Europeans, as degenerate or evolving types, filling the gaps between human and animal world” (Boehmer 1995, 84). Boy’s colonized memory is programmed to control the surrounding reality with categorical thinking.

Such categorical thinking was extended to private areas of life during the Victorian era. Thus, we must recognize that the same empiricist technology that categorized humans along the racial lines also produced categorizations for gender and sexuality. Foucault argues in his *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976) that the Victorian era produced a discourse of biopower which aimed to control the subjects of industrialized, urbanized and modern Western nation states. This meant the emergence of a “population”, people of nation state, whose welfare was not in God’s hands, but an issue to be policed by the empiricist biopower. Governments realized that population forms a political and economic problem with its peculiar variables like “birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health [---, and] at the heart of this economic and political problem was sex” (Foucault 1990, 25). For governments, controlling the fertility, sexual relations and reproduction of its population was of utmost importance. Different kinds of perversions, deviancies, and other “threats” to heterosexual reproduction were to be classified, categorized, and delegitimized. According to Foucault, this sexologic discourse of biopower also produced the category of “homosexuality” (Foucault 1990, 43). Cliff’s narrators, for example, are unwilling to use terms such as “homosexual”, “lesbian”, “gay” in the Caribbean context, in order to highlight their foreign, Western origins.

Lately, many scholars have paid attention to the fact that Victorian empiricist conceptualizations of race and sexology were vectors in the same equation of biopower observing and classifying bodies. Thus, the idea of ‘race’ was a key concept also in modern sexual politics.<sup>126</sup> This idea is briefly present in Foucault’s work who claims that there were “systematic campaigns which [---] tried to transform the sexual conduct of couples on to concerted economic and political behaviour. *In time these new measures would become anchorage points for the different varieties racism of the nineteenth and twentieth century*” (Foucault 1990, 26 italics added). Sexuality became a public issue both in Europe and in the colonies where the state was policing not only the health of the population, but also their racial differences along the lines of hierarchical narratives. In her extensive study of sexualized racial divisions, Siobhan Somerville demonstrates that racism and the rational of empiricist classifications offered both

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<sup>126</sup> On the intertwined nature of racial and sexual discourses of the nineteenth century see Ferguson 2004, Stoler 1995, Tuhkanen 2002 & 2004, and Young 1995. Young concentrates on Edward Long’s notorious *History of Jamaica* (1774) analysing the ways in which Long’s racism is expressed in sexual terms. For more on Long vs. Young debate see Donnell 2006, 185-7.

a language and concepts for modern sexologists in categorizing sexual deviances. Psycho-pathological racism lent its methods to investigate sexuality “scientifically” (Somerville 2000; 3, 10, 17). Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien encapsulate the same idea by stating that “the prevailing Western concept of sexuality...*already contains racism*” (qtd. in Somerville 2000, 5). Whiteness was associated with sexual purity whereas racialized ‘Others’ are also sexually suspicious.

Somerville points out that the concepts of comparative anatomy provided concepts for racial differences of that time. While the nineteenth century sexologists used racial terms such as “shades of gender” or “sexual half-breeds” to describe homosexuality, racial features were often illustrated with comparisons of (female) sexual organs (Somerville 2000; 24, 26-7, 33, 37). Consequently, I argue that the intersectional axes of race, sexuality, and colonialism scrutinized within Cliff’s novels are already fundamentally intertwined. Furthermore, in the context of Cliff’s characters, this leads to an important question concerning those subjects who do not fit in the black/white –dichotomy. As Somerville asks, how were they “situated in relation to the emergence of a discourse of homo- and heterosexuality” (Somerville 2000, 13). Somerville analyzes the question widely as she reads the novel *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912) by James Weldon Johnson (see Somerville 2000, 111-30). Cliff’s borderline characters provide numerous examples of these kinds of ambivalent positionings. For example, Clare’s ambivalent sexual and gendered positions connect her to the earlier literary convention, to the so-called “tragic mulatta tradition”. As Somerville notes “the mulatta figure’s movement between worlds also eroticizes her” (84). I would like to argue that Clare’s figure radicalizes the tragic mulatta tradition by rendering her sexual ambivalence visible, by queering it.<sup>127</sup>

However, the controlling apparatus of sexuality also policed the color-line of the nation. As Ann Laura Stoler argues, “the discursive and practical field in which nineteenth-century bourgeois sexuality emerged was situated on an imperial landscape where the cultural accoutrements of bourgeois distinction were partially shaped through contrasts forged in the politics and language of race” (Stoler 1995, 5).<sup>128</sup> Within the racial process of nation-building, the kind of sexuality, which “crosses the color line”, was a taboo – particularly for women. A white women’s body was to be controlled in order to guard the borders of the nation.<sup>129</sup> In *Abeng* the intertwined nature of racist, nationalist and sexologic discourses is rendered visible by the

127 For more on Clare’s ambivalent gendered and sexual identities see Gourdine 2002, 88-90; Agosto 1999, 110-14; Walker 2001, 167-8; and Ilmonen 2004 & 2005.

128 Ferguson explains that in United States white heteropatriarchal middle-class families “became the standard against which other families were judged” (86), which led to a construction of African American sexuality “as wild, unstable, and undomesticated” locating African American sexuality within the irrational, and therefore outside the bound of the citizenship machinery” (Ferguson 2004, 87). Gayatri Gopinath transfers this discussion into colonial discourse and reminds that it is women’s bodies on which the borders of patriarchal “national collectivities are drawn” and that historically it is sexuality which secures the grounds “for the production of gendered colonial, bourgeois national” subjects” (Gopinath 2002, 158). Mrs. Stevens’ character illustrates these kinds of theorizations.

129 For more on the position of a white woman in the colonies and within a plantocracy see Beckles 1995, 128-34.

story of Mrs. Stevens.<sup>130</sup> Mrs. Stevens, whom Clare meets at the end of the novel, is depicted as psychically disordered. This white lady is neurotically afraid of water. Her neurosis developed after she, as a young woman, fell in love with a black servant and gave birth to his child. Thus, she broke the Victorian codes of moral and racial purity, and violated the norms of biopower.<sup>131</sup> As Mrs. Stevens fails the expectations of surroundings, she loses her possibility to succeed in life. She falls sick and starts to see herself as contaminated and dirty:

"All the water in the world cannot wash away what I did. My sad life. Which made another sad life. All the salt in the world cannot draw out the infection I carry in me. I live in repentance for my sins. I am not what I was meant to be." (A, 164.)

As Mrs Stevens "is afraid of water as most people are afraid of death" (A, 164), her body and her home are covered with filth. She embodies the punishment of the Victorian moral values which she explains to Clare:

"They punished him because I had a baby for him. They punished me because I let a coon get too close to me. But their punishment lacked imagination – they were just acting according to their tradition." [---]. "But what I did was wrong, you see. I knew better. I knew that God meant that coons and buckra people were not meant to mix their blood. It's not right. Only sadness comes from mixture." (A, 163-4.)

Mrs. Stevens is unable to question the normative codes of conduct invested in her. Her story becomes a metonymy of boundaries separating "purity" and "filthy", but also "sanity" and madness<sup>132</sup>, as her neurotic self-loathing follows the logic of bourgeois modernity attaching the dirt to raciality and sexuality. Even though Mrs. Stevens finds no way out of her situation, her story has subversive potential. It is not merely coincidental that she should be the one to tell Clare about the slave ship *Zong*, the very ship the reader is to meet again in *Free Enterprise*. As in *Free Enterprise* the *Zong* becomes a powerful symbol of revolutionary consciousness, it refers

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<sup>130</sup> Mrs. Stevens is a sister of Mrs Phillips, the fine lady to whose house Clare is sent after shooting Miss Mattie's bull. Mrs. Phillips is a stereotypical Victorian lady with extremely racist thoughts. These sisters are, once again, intertextual references to *Great Expectations* by Dickens. Mrs. Stevens could be juxtaposed to Abel Magwich, as her "skin was flecked and caked with dirt" (A, 161). Mrs. Phillips, on the contrary, has the characteristics of Mrs. Havisham as they both stay like ghosts in their great houses clung to the past. However, Pip the main character in *Great Expectations*, is paralleled to Clare: whereas Pip needs to figure out to whom he turns to find refuge, Mrs. Havisham or Abel Magwich, Clare must negotiate between Boy and Kitty. They both need to leave in order to 'become' themselves and to find to whom they will have 'allegiance'. For more on the intertextual relations between *Abeng* and *Great Expectations* see Renk 1999, 106-9 & Gouridine 2002, 88-9.

<sup>131</sup> Somerville argues that as late as in the early twentieth century the 'color-line' was fundamentally eroticized. Interracial sexuality was a taboo comparable to homosexuality. Emblematically, Somerville uses the phrase "'perverse' racial desire". (Somerville 2000, 34.) Moreover, M. Jacqui Alexander has analyzed widely how colonized sexuality gave birth to the postcolonial gender system in the Caribbean area. The colonized moral codes were created to support the capitalist system of plantocracy. As Alexander notes, the management of sexuality through morality is "inextricably bound to colonial rule" (Alexander 1991, 133). The heterosexual code was manifested as natural and "licit form of sexuality" by creating a category of illicit or criminalized sex (Alexander 1991, 138).

<sup>132</sup> According to Belinda Edmondson, Clare's meeting with Mrs. Stevens hints to her potential psychological instability echoing the literary "tragic mulatta tradition" and the Victorian suspicions towards mixed race people (Edmondson 1993, 184). However, I agree with Sika Dagbovie who, in her article about biracial identities, opposes Edmondson. Dagbovie claims that by evoking the "mulatto" stereotype Edmondson "neglects Clare's potential as a biracial subject" (Dagbovie 2006, 95).

here to a change for Clare too, anticipating her future revolutionary actions. After hearing the story of the Zong, depicted in the very last lines of *Abeng*, Clare's sexual and political awakening begins: "Something had happened to her – was happening to her" (A, 166). She is to be the one who questions the codes condemning Mrs. Stevens.

### 3.2. The Caribbean as the Flip Side of Imperial Modernity

Paul Gilroy has re-considered the conditions of modernity from the perspective of a postcolonial subject in his well-known study *The Black Atlantic* (1996). He defines transatlantic modernity through syncretism; pluralities, dialogues, and interaction (see Gilroy 1996). The movement of modernity is not a one-way street but includes criss-crossings from Europe to the colonies, between the colonies, and from the colonies to Europe. These criss-crossings of effects and transatlantic influences are discussed in Cliff's novels. They use the power of fiction to examine the effects of Western modernity on Caribbean nature and civilizations. They highlight the central role the Caribbean islands had in the process of European urbanization. I will now examine further the Caribbean influences on Eurocentric modernity and analyse how Michelle Cliff's novels discover and deconstruct its trajectories.

Industrializing Western societies needed colonies to maintain their prosperity and to offer their citizens, future consumers, different kinds of commodities. As mentioned earlier, the colonial frame of thought was based on empiricist ideas which regarded the indigenous peoples of the colonies as racialized others whose enlightenment was "the white man's burden". The idea of a 'burden' was used to justify the treatment of indigenous peoples as their environment and customs were subordinated to the ruling, white classes. The Caribbean area has played an important role in colonial history, and the issue is also emphasized in Cliff's novels. It was the very first part of 'New World' that the European expeditioners laid their eyes on since the sailing across the Atlantic became possible. Thus the attitudes towards "others", "newly discovered" people, were formed in relation to Native Caribbean people. I will argue that soon enough the Caribbean evolved as a flip side of Western modernity. The islands were both granaries for producing luxury commodities and a phantasmatic paradise where adventurers could go 'looking for themselves', to encounter their individual limits. Moreover, the Caribbean flora and fauna were to be altered in order to better serve the demands of the mother country. The 'colonial order of things' institutionalized the empiricist and developmentalist idea that the nature of the colonies was to serve the industrializing European societies. As Ann Laura Stoler argues, the colonies were "laboratories of modernity" (Stoler 1995, 15).

As a colonial laboratory, the Caribbean area was particularly fitting. The islands were close together and manageable in size. Moreover, the climate was favourable for many types of plants giving the Caribbean an integral role in imperial production. The production is described in *Free Enterprise*:

But then the island was in an almost constant state of reordering. Ganja came with the coolies in 1845, ackee with slaves from the Bight of Benin, banana from the Canary Islands with the Spanish in 1520.

And then there was Lord Rodney's ship the *Flora*, aptly named, an apotheosis of importation. She carried into our midst the nutmeg, cinnamon, mango, for example. Coffee from Ethiopia. Aloe, the only plant brought out of Eden, from Southern Africa. And on, and on, and on. [...] The empiricism of the empire. The imbalancing of the world. The mongoose from India is brought to the Caribbean to control the wildlife of the canefields. God save us from the wildlife, wild life. The mongoose eats everything in its path, save the Africans cutting cane [...]. (FE, 55-6).

The effects of imperial modernity have been engraved into the Caribbean nature, population, languages, culture, gender- and racial hierarchies. Commodities such as chocolate, rum, sugar, coffee, and tobacco were desired in the European metropolis. Much has been written about the connection between coffee-culture and Enlightenment rationalism.<sup>133</sup> Rum, coffee, tea, and tobacco were consumed in clubs and coffee-houses which became the "public sphere" for political and social discussions favoring and promoting Enlightenment ideals. Indeed, Mimi Sheller, in her path-breaking study *Consuming the Caribbean* (2003), critically points out that few academics have noted the Eurocentrism included in the Enlightenment 'public sphere', studied substantially for example by Jürgen Habermas (Sheller 2003, 84). Sheller explains that "Habermas's analysis of the bourgeois public sphere is typical of much contemporary social theory inasmuch as his concern with European urban centres and 'bourgeois' culture precludes any discussion of the colonial world in relation to an emerging modernity and forecloses the possibility that the colonies are crucial to modernity" (Sheller 2003, 84). Therefore, it can be argued that the consumption of the Caribbean lies on the flip side of colonial modernity.

Anne McClintock has aptly called the European imperial modernity a "commodity spectacle" (1995, 56). This spectacle of commodities and luxury items had a major impact on the colonies. The narrator in *Abeng* analyzes how the image of a cosy tea-time in England or the stimulating aroma of coffee hide a whole machinery of violence:

Sugar was a necessity of Western civilization – to the tea-drinkers of England and the coffee-drinkers of the Continent, those who used to sweeten their beverage, or who laced these beverages with rum. Those who took these products at their leisure – to finish a meal, begin a day, to stimulate them, keep them awake, as they considered fashion or politics or family, sitting around their cherrywood tables or relaxing in their wing-backed chairs. People who spent afternoons in the clubs of Mayfair or evenings in the cafés on the rue de la Paix. [...] They took their coffee and tea, their sugar and rum, from trays held by others, as their cotton was milled by others, and their lands were kept by others. *The fabric of their society, their civilization, their culture, was an intricate weave, at the heart of which was enforced labor of one kind or another.* (A, 27, emphasis added.)

Science, agriculture, and the commodity spectacle of the urbanizing London required colonies as laboratories. For these reasons, nature in many Caribbean islands needed to be re-shaped

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133 See e.g. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991/1962).

to suit the growing demands. On many islands the flora and fauna were altered accordingly.<sup>134</sup> As the narrator in *Free Enterprise* concludes about the actions of the colonizer: “They helped themselves to the world as if they had created it” (FE, 47).

However, it is important to note that the Caribbean was also consumed in other ways. First, the area became a spectacle itself. In numerous adventure-, travel-, pirate-, and ‘voyage at the sea’ types of narratives the Caribbean islands were represented as a stereotypical paradise. Similar archaic paradise images circulated in nineteenth century adventure novels are still persistently present in contemporary, neocolonial touristic advertising. Sheller notes that the Caribbean paradise islands became “places against which processes of modern urbanisation, industrialisation, democratisation, rationalisation, individualisation, and so on could be gauged” (Sheller 2003, 2). The Edenic image of untamed nature in the tropics became a defining boundary for what was “modern” in Eurocentric modernity. Second, as the native Caribbean population quickly decreased, these ‘laboratories’ were changed into plantations relying on African slave labor to produce sugar, rum, cannabis, tobacco, fruit and other such produce. The Caribbean basin was an integral part of the triangle trade between Europe, Africa, and America being located conveniently between Africa and America, as a “Middle Passage”. It became quickly a culmination point in slave trade and plantation economy. Therefore, the Caribbean provided a theatre for imperial fantasy and for modern knowledge production as anthropology, botany, ethnology, linguistics and many other areas of study have taken the Caribbean under examination.<sup>135</sup> The narrator in *Abeng* does not tire of repeating the extent to which capitalism has affected Jamaica. She also ironically hints that some abolitionist efforts were capitalistically motivated:

One of the reasons the English parliament and the Crown finally put an end to the slave trade was that because of the Victorian mania for cleanliness, manufacturers needed West African palm oil to make soap – soon the trade in palm oil became more profitable than the trade in men and women and the merchants shifted their investments. (A, 18.)

One soap manufacturer, in the city of Manchester, had a sign in his shop window which highlighted this particular development: BUY OUR PALM OIL SOAP AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY. Clear and to the point – the perfect Victorian marriage of economy and altruism. (A, 27.)

<sup>134</sup> The philosophy of John Locke provided a legitimization for this process of alteration. According to Locke, cultivating the land always meant improvement. The land in its natural state was worthless (Strachan 2002, 63). Moreover, as Strachan argues nature was considered hostile. The tropical regions were thought to be dangerous, “corruptive places”, as Rochester declares in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*. They contaminate the white man unless he keeps in his fortress like Robinson. He might even ‘go native’ as happens to Kurtz in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) (see Strachan 2002, 69). By the colonial logic, a European was Adam in Caribbean Eden; “he makes fruit possible, and he eats fruit [...] as an ‘animal’, the slave is part of Adam’s dominion” (Strachan 2002, 68). For more on the interconnectedness of capitalism, colonialism, and industrialization see also Wesseling 1991, 83-4, and in Cliff’s *Abeng* Edlmair 1999, 34-6.

<sup>135</sup> For more on the Caribbean as site of consumption see Sheller 2003, 13-35.



*Abeng* emphasizes that the mobility of products, imageries, representations, capital, and people makes the Caribbean part and parcel of European modernity.<sup>136</sup>

Where plantations served the commodity spectacle of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries urbanizing Europe, tourism has taken their place in the contemporary, post-colonial era. As Ian Strachan argues, hotel resorts have emerged as ‘new plantations’ where the violent Caribbean past is sold to solvent tourists as a kind of fantasy. The contemporary hotel is like a plantation where the colonial hierarchies of race and gender are reasserted. Local people serve predominantly white, upper or middle class customers trying to make their stay as comfortable as possible and keeping their jobs depends on their ability to please tourists (see Strachan 2002, 112-136, *passim*). The Edenic myth is commoditized once again.<sup>137</sup> Strachan examines neo-colonial touristic materials and concludes that the Caribbean islands are represented as happy places where everybody is relaxed and the ecological catastrophes caused by tourism are off set against images of locals living in harmony with nature (Strachan 2002, 96-112). Cliff’s novels strongly oppose the romanticizing discourse of the plantation/hotel.

Cliff’s narrators deconstruct the images of paradise hotels by revealing how brutally they recycle the history thus commoditizing violence. *Abeng*’s narrator describes how Jamaican employees even have to act as slaves working on a patch of a canefield on the yard of Plantation hotel:

[Paradise Plantation was] fitted with period furniture imported from a factory in Massachusetts which made replicas of antiques. And white plaster dummies from a factory in New York City, which supplied several Fifth Avenue department stores, were dressed in nineteenth-century costume, and placed in the verandah and through the rooms. One large-than-life white dummy was dressed like an overseer, with cat-o’-nine tails in one plaster fist, and a wide-brimmed straw hat on his head. He stood firmly, with his legs apart, to the side of the great house, welcoming purchasers to the subdivision.

A small patch of canefield was left by the developers. And Black Jamaicans, also in period costume – but alive, not replicas – were paid to stand around with machetes and hoes, and give directions to interested parties.

The brochure stressed “atmosphere”. (A, 37.)

The narrator points out how Jamaicans must live a life of slaves for those who want to buy the past. *Abeng* includes a reference to a hotel called “Arawak Hotel”, named after a native people who became extinct, and in *No Telephone to Heaven* there is a hotel called “Plantation Inn”. The local reality is hidden under the shiny pictures in travel catalogues. As Strachan argues,

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136 For more on the problematic relationship between modernity, the Caribbean, and the process of creolization see Bongie 1998, 1-24. Bongie observes that “the violence of modernity is one to which the entire world has been consciously subjected” (Bongie 1998, 15).

137 The imageries of the Caribbean as paradise, where work is light and easy, are recycled in the touristic brochures. According to Strachan “easy Caribbean living” originates from the eighteenth century discussions of abolitionism. At that time, pro-slavery claims arguing that “slave labor in the Caribbean is lighter and immeasurably more pleasant than the toil of the labouring poor throughout England” emerged (Strachan 2002, 53).



the sunny brochure pictures are “perpetuating the stereotypes of the place and the people” (Strachan 2002, 241). The paradise island can be re-invented time and again.

In *A Small Place* (1988), Jamaica Kincaid has criticized the touristic representation of Antigua. The narrator also lashes out at the local people who, according to her, have mistaken the touristic imagery for reality and consider it an ideal way to live. Strachan has analyzed “a kind of brochure self-knowledge” which interpellates<sup>138</sup> people to idealize a touristic and consumerist lifestyle promoting a neocolonialist system of values. In the Bahaman context, Strachan stresses that “hotel life begins to influence what Bahamans think it means to have a good time (Strachan 2002; 132, 134). As the jobs in tourism are considered more glamorous, and traditional agricultural or educational careers are undervalued, the social structure is distorted (Strachan 2002, 141-2). In *No Telephone to Heaven*, this neocolonialist dream is parodied as two American film producers are discussing the Jamaicans:

“Jamaicans will do everything for a buck....Look around you...the hotels...the private resorts where you have to get an invite...reggae festivals for white kids... Jesus! The cancer spas for rich people. Everyone from the hookers to the prime minister, babe. These people are used to selling themselves. [---].” (NTH, 202.)

The aim of the film producers is to make a romantic movie about Jamaican history presenting a love affair between Nanny and another historical Maroon-leader, Cudjoe. The neocolonialist movie-machinery appropriates ‘the exotic other’ by transforming it into convenient form for American movie-goers. The producers want to represent the Jamaican rebellion with polished and commoditized images “cannibalizing the indigenous history”, as Fiona Barnes puts it (1992, 23):

Two figures stood out in the costumed group. One, a woman, the actress called in whenever someone was needed to play a Black heroine, whether Sojourner Truth or Bessie Smith, this woman wore a pair of leather breeches and a silk shirt – designer’s notion of the clothes that Nanny wore. Dear Nanny, the Coromantee warrior, leader of the Windward Maroons, whom one book described as an old woman naked except for a necklace made from the teeth of whitemen. [---]. But such detail was out of the question, given these people even knew the truth. Or cared. Facing the elegant actress was a strapping man, former heavyweight or running back, dressed as Cudjoe, tiny humpbacked soul. (NTH, 206.)

Subsequently, the ultimate aim of Clare’s Guerrilla group is to sabotage this movie set. Cliff’s narration wants to confront the “fake archeology”<sup>139</sup> of Jamaican history. The scene describes the way (neo)colonialist representations manipulate the subaltern past and emphasize

<sup>138</sup> Strachan considers this kind of “brochure self-knowledge” as an Althusserian ideological state apparatus which interpellates Bahaman subjects as polite, helpful, and smiling servants for tourists (Strachan 2002, 131). For Caribbean tourism, see also Davies 1994, 23-7.

<sup>139</sup> Fiona Barnes draws the term “fake archeology” from Foucault. See Barnes 1992, 24.

that economical dependence on Euro-American tourist money is not dissimilar to imperial reliance.<sup>140</sup>

In the case of modernity, cultural movements are, as we noticed above, constantly in a state of flux. Global cultural streams transporting meanings and influences are hybrid and polyvalent. In (post)colonial reality, differences between cultures are interconnected in a dialogue.<sup>141</sup> As Simon Gikandi emphasizes, “Europe’s colonies provided the theater in which modern European identities were shaped and revamped” but also, that “this shaping of identity was predicated on the invention and exclusion of the colonial subject as a figure of alterity” (Gikandi 1996, 7).<sup>142</sup> However, the oppositional settings, which represent colonial and decolonial ideas as intact and separate from each other, must be overcome in order to reach a transnational dialogue between the “scattered hegemonies”, to use the phrase of Inderpal Grewal and Karen Caplan (1997). If Enlightenment gave birth to “Other” it also provided ideals of emancipation to the people regarded as “Other”. I would like suggest that Cliff tries to reach towards a larger dialogue by rendering visible the ways the Caribbean is already intertwined within the project of modernity, which is often considered European.

### 3.3. Colonial Knowledge as White Mythology in *Abeng*

Contemporary Caribbean literature has in many ways deconstructed universalist claims of Eurocentric modernity and its historiography. Many authors have created counter-narratives to discourse produced by colonial institutions. In this chapter, I will analyze how Cliff’s fiction unsettles the ‘colonial order of things’ by revealing its narrative, yet legitimized, nature. Furthermore, I will consider the colonial knowledge production as ‘white mythology’, meaning that it is

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<sup>140</sup> It must, however, be noted that these kinds of binary representations are seldom the whole truth, not even in neocolonial contexts. It is too simple to argue that the Caribbean is just a flip side, commoditized, suffering, and dependent of neocolonial economy. I would like to draw attention to what Ian Strachan calls “black tourism” (2002, 11). It must be acknowledged that there are millions who do not consider the Caribbean to be a colonial laboratory or commoditized paradise, but as the symbol of African-American consciousness and resistance. From the Haitian revolution in 1804, symbolizing the movement to liberty, the Caribbean area has embraced many liberatory movements. For many artists of the Harlem Renaissance, the islands were a metaphor for a new future, a return to Africa, and strength in the face of oppression. Langston Hughes’s literary achievements, Marcus Garvey’s “Back to Africa Movement”, and Bob Marley’s consciousness raising are also part of the Caribbean heritage.

<sup>141</sup> Consequently, I must also emphasize that postcolonial discourses about emancipation, nationalism, identity, and right to self determination are themselves already imbued with European humanist ideals, as Emily Baumann concludes (Baumann, 1998). According to Baumann, postcolonial theorizing uses the very tools of Western humanism and representationalism in order to deconstruct them (Baumann 1998, 83). The modern, post-colonial world is already interconnected; there is no “pure” realm without effects of colonialism to be found.

<sup>142</sup> As Gikandi notes, many phenomena considered European are born only because of this “colonial theatre”. Gikandi’s own example is European modernist art and literature, e.g. an ideal Africa and an African subjectivity were needed in deconstructing European universalist subject formations. For more on the presence of “Otherness” and Africa in Western modernist art, see Gikandi 1996, 157-89. Gikandi deconstructs the oppositional idea that colonialism is merely evil. One example for him is the situation of women. He argues that, for white women, the colonies provided many opportunities to escape patriarchal institutions. Moreover, Gikandi claims that England and the colonies do not exist separately, they are constantly interacting with each other; England without the colonies is an illusion (Gikandi 1996, 56, 80-1). For more on the interconnected nature of England and the colonies see Gikandi 1996, 2-49 and for the women’s perspective see 119-156.

an authorized form of discourse, which organizes, names, and structures colonized reality while marginalizing its colonized subjects. Moreover, white mythology naturalizes and perpetuates ideologically structured hierarchies between the colonizer and the colonized. Richard Dyer has argued that whiteness can represent everything and nothing. It signifies everything that is good, pure, or neutral, but also the absence of special features. It appears to be without properties. (See Dyer 1997, 1-3.) Whiteness seems to have no qualities to be observed or classified, it is not a subject of empiricism, and as such it is a myth. For Roland Barthes, myth is regarded as “innocent speech”, “not because its intentions are hidden” but “because they are naturalized” (Barthes 2000, 131). Consequently, I will use the Barthesian concept of myth to describe the colonial knowledge apparatus. My aim is to analyse the ways in which Cliff’s novels make the colonial mythologies visible for the reader, thus rendering them vulnerable to parody, mimicry and deconstruction.

I will approach Barthes’ mythology deductively through general definitions of the myth. In *The Magic Mirror: Myth’s Abiding Power* (1996), Elizabeth Baeten criticizes simplified and undefined uses of the term “myth”. For her, myth is too often reduced to “mistaken belief” or something which does not have a solid foundation “in the facts of the matter” derogating what is considered mythical and honoring whatever is, in each case, understood to oppose that myth (Baeten 1996, 5). Baeten explains that myths are often connected to what is ‘other’ within our own belief system. Myths are used to define ourselves through difference, to identify ourselves with what is strange and what belongs to us in terms of existential, historical, or intellectual positions (Baeten 1996; 10, 37). Her ideas challenge Western postcolonial scholars to reconsider their own system of thinking, aware that it is contingent. Ideals supporting colonialism, such as the rationality of Enlightenment thinking and the modern “myth of individual autonomy” must also be considered a myth, a mythically constituted episteme (see e.g. Povinelli 2005).<sup>143</sup> Below, I am to present how Cliff deconstructs colonial myths in her fiction.

In *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes analyzes the functions of modern myths. According to Barthes myth enables an ideology to seem uncontested as it provides “a historical intention a natural justification”, and makes “contingency appear eternal” (Barthes 2000, 142). Myth appears as depoliticized language which has a power to proclaim its knowledge as fact. However, according to Barthes the idiosyncrasy of myth is that it does not deny things; its function is to talk about them. Myth purifies them, makes them innocent, and gives them a natural justification. Myth does not explain things but offers the clarity of a statement of fact (Barthes 2000, 143). Subsequently, myth does not need to be reflected upon, it evaporates its contingent nature and makes the historical seem natural – as Barthes explains myth “passes from history to nature” (143), and therefore the historical appears as naturally occurring and inevitable. As

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<sup>143</sup> The Enlightenment rationality has supported the modern ‘myth of individual autonomy’, which in the postcolonial context according to Elizabeth Povinelli has even intensified neoliberalism and neocolonialism. In her polemic article Povinelli contests myths such as individuality, freedom, and tolerance in order to understand what kinds of knowledge systems are overshadowed by the “obvious desirability” of these concepts. See Povinelli 2005.

Baeten interprets Barthes, myth has thus the ability to manipulate people, to make them believe that historically determined order is a natural one (Baeten 1996, 172). For Barthes, ideologies like Imperialism can be naturalized by myth, and he himself uses French imperial imageries to illustrate his theorizations (Barthes 2000, 117-127). Moreover, the essential issue in Barthes' conceptualization of myth is that, ultimately, myth is a system of communication and a mode of signification. It is not defined by the object of its message but by "the way it utters this message" (Barthes 2000, 109). Thus, myth is also a type of speech, and everything provided by discourse can be a myth.

In compliance with Barthes, discourses such as Colonialism, Victorian social hierarchies, empiricist racism, Enlightenment rationality, even ideals of modernity, could be considered discursive myths. The normative status of white ethnicity is mythically manifested as an axiomatic truth, a natural fact having been used to rationalize ideological practises such as colonial rule. As Western modernity is based on what James Ferguson calls narratives of hierarchy and development, it was easy to justify global inequalities resulting from a fact that "some nations were further along than others on the ladder to a unitary modernity" (Ferguson 2005, 167). Thus, the myth of development "mapped the history against hierarchy" (Ferguson 2005, 167).<sup>144</sup> Cliff's novels address the power myths have in perceiving, structuring, or representing colonialist reality. One of the most powerful colonial mythologies is, as we noticed in the story of Mrs. Stevens, that lighter skin color reflects more than social prestige; it is treated as an indicator of sexual and moral purity. The order of colonialist mythology naturalizes the idea that race and sexuality co-construct each other. The narrator seems to explain to the reader the constitution of colonial psyche through a violent mythology by summarizing Clare's thoughts while she is reading *Ivanhoe*:

She [Clare] had been carefully instructed about race and color and lightening. [...] She knew, that when the time came, should she choose a husband darker than herself, it would be just as if she were Ivanhoe choosing Rebecca rather than Rowena. Boy would place her firmly outside – "beyond the pale," he said. He also implied that if she chose a darker husband, others would know that she was sexually impure and forced to make the best of it. What other reason would she possibly have? Boy taught his eldest daughter that she came from his people – white people, he stressed – and he expected Clare to preserve his green eyes and light skin – those things she had been born with. And she had a duty to try to turn the green eyes blue, once and for all – and make the skin, now gold, become pale and subject to visible sunburn. These things she should pursue. (A, 127).<sup>145</sup>

<sup>144</sup> I agree with Ferguson that the myth of developmentalism has characterized postcolonial nations and societies as "belated" or "behind" in developmental time (Ferguson 2005, 178). Based on this argument I would be very cautious when talking about "belated modernities" et cetera. Nonetheless, developmentalist terminology has become general e.g. in contemporary scholarship on Eastern European societies, whether ex-Soviet states or ex-Yugoslavian republics.

<sup>145</sup> As Shirley Toland-Dix explains, there is "a legal and historical rationale in Boy Savage's plans". Jamaica had a unique colonial practise "of publicly transforming Negroes into white men" (Toland-Dix 2004, 51-2 n. 1). Toland-Dix quotes Winthrop Jordan's study *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (1968) explaining old colonial laws in Jamaica: "[...] and no one shall be deemed a Mulatto after the Third Generation, as aforesaid, but that they shall have all the Privileges and Immunities of His Majesty's white Subjects of this Island" (qtd. in Toland-Dix 2004, 52, n. 1).

Clare knows that her task is to transfer her green eyes to future generations and, in time, turn them blue. The operation of the myth is pointed out, and thus de-naturalized. The myth loses its factual nature.

Boy's fixation with the blue eyes represents his firm belief in white mythologies. In his seminal study *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (1990) Robert Young examines the western philosophical tradition and its rationality in relation to encounters with an "Other". Young applies the concept of "ontological imperialism" by Emmanuel Levinas in order to explain how the "Other" is neutralized within the process of comprehending it: "When knowledge or theory comprehends the other, then the alterity of the latter vanishes as it becomes part of the same" (Young 1990, 13). The process of comprehending the "Other" is based on the white man's reason. Consequently, Young applies the conceptualization provided by Jacques Derrida concerning Western metaphysics as "white mythology":

Metaphysics – the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own logos, that is, the mythos of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason. (Derrida in *Margins of Philosophy*, qtd. in Young 1990, 7.)

For Derrida the Indo-European mythology has the right to call itself Reason, thus removing the other out of the horizon of logos. In Cliff's novels, this unchallenged Reason sets the white skin hierarchically above others, even though in the creolized Caribbean space whiteness is a vacillating concept – merely a hierarchy of shades. Cliff's narratives problematize this hierarchy by revealing its arbitrary nature and presenting its tragic effects. In *Abeng* white mythologies and hierarchies of shades slyly operate in Clare's school:

Light and dark were made much of in that school. It was really nothing new in Jamaica – but, as in the rest of the society, it was concealed behind euphemisms of talent, looks, aptitude. [...] Color was diffuse and hard to track at St. Catherine's, entering the classrooms as seating arrangements, disciplinary action, entering the auditorium during the casting of a play. The shadows of color permeated the relationships of the students, one to one. When the girls found out that Victoria Carter, whom everyone thought was the most beautiful girl in school, was the daughter of a Black man who worked as a gardener and an Englishwoman who had settled in Jamaica, her position in their eyes was transformed, and girls who had been quite intimidated by her, now spoke about her behind her back. (A, 100.)

Ontological imperialism has a power to define children's futures. They are taught from early on to pursue a light-skinned spouse to have lighter children than themselves.

However, the Savage family itself needs white mythologies to protect themselves, or as Kathleen Renk explains, "to buffer the Savages from the reality of their ancestors' experiences" (Renk 1999, 71). The narrator explains that:

The definition of what a Savage was like was fixed by color, class, and religion, and over the years a carefully contrived *mythology was constructed, which used to protect their identities*. When they were poor, and not all of them white, the mythology persisted. They swore by it. It added a depth to their conversation, and kept them interested in each other. Only in each other. If the conversation turned to the knotty hair of a first cousin, it would be switched to the Savage ancestor who had been the first person to publicly praise *Paradise Lost*. (A, 29, first emphasis added.)

Boy's stories about Judge Savage are meant to protect the family in the colonial reality divided by shades of skin color. Ontological imperialism effects the past by regulating how history can be told. White mythologies predetermine the lives of Kitty and Boy in many ways. Kitty's marriage to Boy illustrates the compulsiveness of colonial Reason. She ends up abandoning her own dreams in order to act according to white mythology:

Perhaps her marriage to Boy was *an attempt to contain colonialism in her own home* - not conscious, of course. Both of them Boy and Kitty were locked in the past - separate pasts to be sure, but each clung to something back there. [...] Maybe Kitty never questioned this decision of hers to keep darkness locked inside. Perhaps she assumed that a light-skinned child was by common law, or traditional practise, the child of the whitest parents. (A, 128 - 9, emphasis added.)

"Common law" and "traditional practise" reveal to us that the subject positions offered by the colonial discourse are not voluntary, but legitimized by compulsory performatives.<sup>146</sup> Kitty distances herself from her eldest daughter, which later appears to be the main reason for Clare's feelings of unbelonging. For Kitty the distance remains natural - it does not occur to her that Clare could embrace her darker parent. Even though Clare later chooses to align herself with the anticolonial struggle, the distrust of her darker sisters and brothers remains between them. In Jamaica in the 1950s light skin meant "privilege, civilization, erasure, forgetting" (NTH, 44).<sup>147</sup>

Boy's belief system is built solely on a white 'machinery' of myths. The machinery is supernatural, more than human, and therefore absolutely universal. The system organized by white myths is beyond doubts and questions:

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<sup>146</sup> The English colonialist mythos underlined the unquestioned rule of the loving motherland, and its wise and beautiful queen who protected the colonial paradise. As Kathleen Renk explains also "architecture and art contributed to this 'spectacle of empire'. Wherever the English developed colonies, the Anglican church, along with the English great house, loomed over the settlement." Moreover, "a statue of Victoria presided over the daily lives of the colonists and the colonized, a constant reminder that the queen ruled that dominion as well as many others. Her watchful eye, like god's, was everywhere" (Renk 1999, 31). Elaborate rituals and ceremonies were staged to awe the native. England itself was like a paradise where colonial subjects could travel to educate themselves, which is also done by Clare in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Jamaica, the colony was like a garden, wild and untamed, which needed to be cultivated and taken care of by the "improving hand" of English civilization (see Renk 1999, 32-3). Thus the imperial mythology interpellated colonial subjects ambiguously. On the one hand, they were made believe that they did belong to the same commonwealth family, while on the other hand they were made clear that they were different. This is the ambivalence of the colonialist logic of mimicry. Consequently, "the Creole" signified both sameness and difference at the same time. According to Renk, a Creole was like a bastard child of the Empire. (For a more general discussion of the topic see Renk 1999, 28-37.)

<sup>147</sup> For more on the theme of racial distrust in *No Telephone to Heaven* see Toland-Dix 2004. Meryl Schwartz also observes that Cliff is acutely aware of the distrust expressed "towards those who make a commitment to struggle against the material and ideological bases of their privileged positions" (Schwartz 1996, 289).

Mr. Savage was fascinated by myth and natural disaster. He collected books on Stonehenge, the Pyramids, the Great Wall of China – he knew the details of each ancient structure and was convinced that all were connected to some magical source – some “divine plan,” he said. Nothing, to him was ever what is seemed to be. Nothing was an achievement of human labor. Devising arch and circle; creating brick from straw and mud and hauling stone to the site of construction. Mr. Savage was a believer in extraterrestrial life – in mythic piece of machinery found in a bed of coal: part of spaceship, he concluded; proof that we had been visited by beings from another planet, who might be observing us even now. (A, 9.)

In addition to extraterrestrial plans, Boy believes in the idea of ‘the elects’ of Presbyterian Church. Boy is fascinated by the predestination of the elects whose fate is sealed beforehand. He has a strong belief that the true Savages will have “the sweetness of eternity” (A, 45). However, as the narrator explains, only his lightest daughter is a true Savage for Boy: “Little of this [the recorded fate] was articulated by Boy to any but his elder daughter. She was a true Savage, he assured her. Her fate was sealed” (A, 45). Boy’s absolute system of universe includes Jamaica as he teaches to Clare that the West Indian archipelago is “the remains of Atlantis, the floating continent Plato had written in the *Timaeus*” (A, 9). He also tries to connect Jamaica with the Greek island of Crete by claiming that “some say that Crete and Atlantis were one” (A, 9). Boy’s reasoning is taken to such lengths that it parodies the colonial white mythologies thereby leaving the operations of myth vulnerable to critique. Boy needs the mythical Greek origins for Jamaica because it “upgrades” him and Clare as white. Boy’s stories construct a knowledge system, through which Clare would be able to achieve the status of power.<sup>148</sup>

Mythical “whitewash” has other kinds of consequences in *Abeng*. One of them becomes visible in the character of Zoe’s rural school teacher, Mr. Powell. Through his character the narrator demonstrates how hidden but fundamental the white mythologies are in colonial reality. It would be easy to claim that Mr. Powell is a civil rights activist. He strongly opposes the teaching manuals sent from London to places throughout the commonwealth by making the pupils read the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance. He teaches Caribbean history, and arduously admires his old friend Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Association and the Back to Africa Movement. Powell also has another friend, Zora Neale Hurston<sup>149</sup> whom he met years ago in Harlem. In the novel, it is Powell who is said to have accompanied her on her journeys to Jamaican Maroon settlements to gather folklore. However, unlike Zora<sup>150</sup>, Powell cannot admire the Jamaican rural culture as it is, but criticizes her for gathering Jamaican “superstition” (A, 87):

<sup>148</sup> For more on mythologies facilitated by colonialist discourse see Haddour 2000, especially pp. 24-41.

<sup>149</sup> Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) was an American author and folklorist. During the 1930s Hurston conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Haiti and Jamaica.

<sup>150</sup> I use the name “Zora” when referring to character in *Abeng*. Zora Neale Hurston or Hurston is used when the actual historical person is referred to.



But Powell had not liked her book [Hurston's *Tell My Horse*] a-tall, a-tall. Just like Zora to pretend that Jamaicans were comical and uncivilized – little better than Pygmies in the jungle; at least that is what Powell felt. Zora accentuated the African customs too much, what remained of them, far too much; those things had left so many of the country people he knew superstitious. And led them into all manner of foolishness. This was not the way Jamaica should take – these barbarian things should be made as little of as possible. (A, 87.)

Powell strongly believes that his beloved Black people are able to leave behind the brutality of their past, “the nonsense of Obeah<sup>151</sup>” (A, 87), for example, and to “raise themselves to the level of whiteness and eventually surpass them” (A, 87). Here Powell’s thinking is connected to the modernist narratives of development. Whiteness remains the measurement of “advancement” for him:

Garvey’s dream of the Black return to Africa became Mr. Powell’s. But it would not be a bushman’s Africa – it would be an aristocratic and civilized Black continent, where, finally, after hundreds of years of misery, Black supremacy would be evident, and Black people would prove once and for all that they were capable of existing in a white-dominated world *on their own terms*. (A, 88 emphasis added.)

Powell’s reluctant relation to Zora’s work, however, problematizes the phrase “on their own terms”. His view of civilization remains colonial. Moreover, Powell does not question the Eurocentric ideas of aristocracy, but cherishes the idea that it could be transformed into an African reality:

He [Garvey] bestowed titles on some of his adherents – duke of the Niger, countess of the Gold Coast, knight commander of the order of Ethiopia. Placing an English construct over his dream of Africa – for this, people made game of him. As if Black lord or lady was a comical thing. (A, 88.)

Powell does not consider the titles as parodic iterations, for him they represent the advancement of his people.<sup>152</sup>

However, there is more to Powell’s story – namely homosexuality. In *Abeng* there are hints alluding to Powell’s sexual orientation: his wary attitude towards rural “superstition” may actually be a recognition of homophobia. Some early black nationalists, such as Frantz Fanon, considered homosexuality to be a form of European decadence which contaminated pure

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151 In Jamaica Obeah refers to a form of black magic, or rather, a secret tradition sometimes named as “witch craft”. Obeah is a tradition which was born in Jamaica out of syncretic elements drawn on West African religions. The purpose of obeah-magic is to harness supernatural powers either into personal protection or harming the enemy. Nowadays in Jamaica the term “obeah” often refers to all kinds of non-Christian beliefs, rituals, or religious practises. The practitioners of obeah are/were powerful healers and “witch doctors” who operate in secrecy, treating many kinds of personal problems. Many practitioners of obeah are said to be extremely knowledgeable about herbs and poisons. According to Olive Senior, obeah is today illegal in Jamaica, but she observes that it is still practised, for example to “guarantee” green cards or other immigration papers. Senior explains that during the times of slavery obeah was so common that every plantation had at least one obeah-man or –woman. (Senior 2003, 355-7.)

152 Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Laura Gillman examine the effects of forced ideals and double consciousnesses on colonized subjects. They argue that the controversial sets of ideals may even lead into violence between a certain communities (they use the term “horizontal violence”), such as internal racism, multiplicity of color hierarchies, and sexism. (See Floyd-Thomas and Gillman 2002.)



African heterosexuality.<sup>153</sup> It might be suggested that the myth of developmentalism admired by Powell is connected to his homosexuality; his suspicion of rural Jamaican traditions might reflect his judgement of Jamaican homophobia widely described by Cliff. Powell, for example, bears in mind his “friend” Clinton, a character in *Abeng* who is killed by drowning after having been suspected of homosexuality:

Superstition was fine in poetry or stories, Mr. Powell contended, but not in practise. This superstition, and the “ignorance” which accompanied it, was too prevalent in Jamaica – and Mr. Powell blamed it absolutely for the death of his friend Clinton. (A, 87.)

Through Powell’s character the narrator of *Abeng* highlights the problems in mere romanticizing the past. That too contains violence.<sup>154</sup>

In Cliff’s novels white mythology naturalizes itself as rationality, which explains and naturalizes the border between “self” and “other”. While Boy, Kitty, and maybe also Mr. Powell are stuck with the white mythologies, the task to discover another kind of *mythos* is left for Clare in *Abeng*. As the omniscient narrator in *Abeng* articulates Clare’s quest by noting that “the danger to Clare was that the background could slide so easily into the foreground” (A, 25). In *Abeng*, it is the narrator’s voice which counters the constituted nature of “whitewash”, while it is up to Clare to acquire this ability in the sequel, *No Telephone to Heaven*. Her psychological development cannot be based on a romanticized past, nor on a predestined future: but she must figure out her own present life in creolized and de-colonizing terms which do not categorize her either as ‘clare’ or ‘savage’ but both. As Judith Raitskin suggests, Creole subjectivity has the possibility “of crossing boundaries that are conceived as ‘natural’ ” in Cliff’s writings (Raitskin 1996, 194). For her, as Raitskin explains, “race is not an essential biological category but one intricately connected to class and political choice” (194). Finally in *No Telephone to Heaven* Clare, with the aid of Harry/Harriet, learns how to overcome the “facts” of white mythology. They question roles such as ‘weird’, ‘unnatural’, ‘half-breed’, or ‘transsexual’ imposed on them by the surrounding culture. As Raitskin observes, they “challenge the hierarchies of race science and sexology” and “complicate the meaning of ‘identity politics’ ” thus choosing the roles that “permit them to perform the political actions they believe in” (Raitskin 1996, 192). They crystallize the rebellious ethos of Cliff’s novel not only in terms of action, but also in terms of identity construction.

While *Abeng* reveals the influence of white mythologies on colonized subjects, it is *No Telephone to Heaven* which later envisions counter-mythologies. In *Abeng*, the omniscient narrator pinpoints the ambivalent effects of white mythologies, when they are transported into a Jamaican reality, away from the cultural (British) circumstances which gave birth to them. As displaced, the white myths (of origin, of racial supremacy, of individuality, of rationality, of

<sup>153</sup> See for more on Fanon and the issues of homosexuality and homophobia in chapter 6.1.

<sup>154</sup> The homosexual hints remain unrecognized by Booker and Juraga who, in my opinion too straight-forwardly, interpret Powell’s character as representing “a masculine bias in the black cultural tradition” in his scepticism towards Zora’s work (Booker & Juraga 2001, 123 and 125 n. 14).

developmentalism) are rendered hybrid, to follow the logic of Homi K. Bhabha. This hybridized ambivalence of ‘complicating the politics of identity’ which in Cliff’s novels is the source of postcolonial resistance. If we are to read carefully, this logic is already present in the first pages of *Abeng* as the narrator describes ‘the new life’ of Queen Elizabeth II in Kingston:

The whitest woman in the world. Elizabeth II, great-granddaughter of Victoria, for whom the downtown crafts market – where women came from the country-side to sell their baskets and Rastafarians sold their brooms and old Black men sold their wood –carvings to the passengers of cruise ships and Pan-American Clippers – was named. (A, 5.)

The authoritarian symbol ‘Elizabeth II’ is iterated as the name of the crafts market with Rastafarians and market women from the country-side. They all signify both the “incommensurabilities” of Caribbean ‘polyphonic’ consciousness and the hybrid mythology of Cliff’s novels, which I will examine further in Chapter Four. Cliff’s fiction depicts postcolonial reality as a polyphonic and kaleidoscopic realm based on dialectic power-knowledge systems. The rationality of Western modernity is no longer presented as the truth. I agree with Robert Young who states that “the final emancipatory gesture of enlightenment thought would thus be its own liberation from itself, so it is no longer recognizable as reason” (Young 1990, 9). Finally, I would like to argue that white mythologies in *Abeng* are not questioned so much with conscious resistance as in *No Telephone to Heaven* or in *Free Enterprise*, but in the processes of ambivalent hybridity. This ambivalence unravels the idea of a single Reason.

### 3.4. Colonial Language versus Rebellious Speech in *No Telephone to Heaven*

*You taught me language, and my profit on’t  
Is, I know how to curse.*

–Caliban

(William Shakespeare: *The Tempest*)

...and english is  
my mother tongue  
is  
my father tongue  
is a foreign lan lan lang  
language  
l/anguish  
anguish...

–Marlene Nourbese Philip

(Fragment from the poem “Discourse on the Logic of Language” in  
*She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks.*)

In this chapter I will examine “Caliban’s voice” meaning the creolized, Caribbean counter-discourse many authors including Michelle Cliff use in order to “rust” the sharpest weapon of colonizer, the language. I am interested in the bilingualism of Cliff’s narration which refers to textual shifts between Standard English and Jamaican Patois. I will analyze how the linguistic shifts create a polyphonic discourse which is used to dismantle the colonial language and its authoritative power in the novels. The language in Cliff’s novels is constructed on linguistic dialecticism in order to express the polyphonic nature of postcolonial reality. The “compromised” language, negotiating between the expression of the “other” and the expression of the colonizer, highlights the hybrid agencies of colonial reality beyond the binarity authentic/other. The power of language, its right to name, to express, to control is rendered visible in Cliff’s novels, while its discursive power is countered with the rebellious speech of “the Other”. In this chapter I will examine the function of transliterations of spoken Creole in the novels. Later on I will analyze a chapter of *No Telephone to Heaven* called “The dissolution of Mrs. White” in more detail to demonstrate Cliff’s postcolonial linguistic practises, namely the negotiation between language and speech.

In Cliff’s novels, the use of language reflects the diasporic nature of Caribbean culture. The shifting language represents the cultural processes of movements, dislocations, and migrations. Consequently, these textual shifts also signify the double-consciousness of the colonized subjects. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin point out, multilingual communities occur principally in the Caribbean “where a multitude of dialects interweave to form a generally comprehensible linguistic continuum” (Ashcroft et al. 1989, 39). English becomes a continuum of intersections “in which the speaking habits in various communities have intervened to reconstruct the language” (Ashcroft et al. 1989, 39-40). This kind of continuum of intersections is present in Phillips’ poem quoted above. It is typical of Caribbean literature to express the discursive negotiations over identity within creolized culture with the help of linguistic code-switching. According to Jamaican linguist Pauline Christie, code-switching is an every-day strategy in Jamaica. Standard English is used in administrative, juridical, and educational circumstances, as well as in the media, whereas people switch to Creole in personal communication or when affects and sentiments are expressed (Christie 2003, 2). In addition, the use of standard language is connected to higher levels of education, while code switching in literature is often used to illustrate the different class backgrounds of characters. As Christie observes, Creole has taken on a dual meaning in Jamaica. On the one hand it is overlooked as a vernacular language of rural people, but on the other hand it is a way to express one’s Jamaican identity (see Christie 2003, 2-5).<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> The status of Creole language in Jamaica is highly debated. One of the most prominent pro-speakers of Creole is literary scholar Carolyn Cooper. While the official language is English, Jamaican Patois is more widely spoken. It is sometimes referred to as “Jamaican”. Jamaican must not be confused with Standard Jamaican English which varies only slightly from Standard British English and is used in writing.

In Cliff's novels spoken Jamaican Creole has been transliterated<sup>156</sup> and the illusion of voice is embedded in the text thus creating *a speaking subject*, not *a spoken subject* – that is to say a subaltern “being spoken by the subject position they occupy within the larger discursive economy” (Griffiths 1995, 240). Moreover, the linguistic code-switching in the novels is used to highlight the fact that language itself is imbued with epistemological premises. The subaltern subject is already marked as “Other” within colonial discourse as the position available to her is constructed through the discursive ideologies. As Gayatri Spivak explains “the subaltern consciousness is subject to the cathexis of the élite” while “it cannot appear without the thought of élite” (Spivak 1987, 203) manifested within the structures of language. Aligning himself with Spivak, Simon Gikandi asks: “Can the colonial subject represent herself in a structure that negates her autonomy and constantly frustrates her desire for agency?” (Gikandi 1996, 140). Gikandi underlines the elements of ambivalence inherent in colonial subjectivity because of its constitution through colonial language. Consequently, the discourse used to oppose colonialism always uses colonial language (Gikandi 1996, 142), but language must be altered and distorted since, as Audre Lorde explains, the “master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”.<sup>157</sup>

In Cliff's narration, the process of dismantling involves intertextual references to a rebellious literary tradition and transliterations of vernacular language in order to seek new ways to transform the spoken subject into a speaking subject. For example, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, each new chapter begins with citations, poems, traditional hymns, or proverbs. These paratextual elements<sup>158</sup> foreground an assemblage of subaltern texts within which the (post)colonial subject is not spoken for. By quoting Derek Walcott, Aimé Césaire, Dionne Brand, Yoruban hymns, and Jamaican proverbs, Cliff also sets her novel in dialogue with African Caribbean and Creole texts, demonstrating that a text is always constituted in relation with other texts. By citing rebellious and revolutionary text fragments, such as Yoruban hymns describing the violent power of Ogun (NTH, 177), or Césaire's poem for a Maroon woman (NTH, 85), Cliff's paratextuality deconstructs colonial uses of language and provides a rebellious discourse for postcolonial speaking subject.

Abdul R. JanMohamed used the term “Minority Discourse” as early as twenty years ago to describe the common denominators that link various minority cultures to one another.<sup>159</sup> Josaphat Kubayanda has discussed the problems of Minority Discourse in the context of

156 According to Kubayanda, this is typical of Caribbean writers (see Kubayanda 1990, 250-3). The use of Patois sabotages the “proper” use of language. It is a counter-discourse which enables the visions of resistance. These counter-discourses outlined by Kubayanda are a strategic means for expressing the collective emotions and worldviews shared by those oppressed.

157 Lorde's essay entitled “Masters Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House” was first published in 1981 in a collection called *This Bridge Called My Back* edited by Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Toni Cade Bambara.

158 Gérard Genette defines paratext as those elements in a published work that accompany the text, elements such as the author's name, title, *preface* or *introduction*, or inscriptions, appendages, epigraphs, and dedications. For Genette, paratexts form a zone of transition and transaction between text and off-text which influence the reader (Genette 1987, 3). In Cliff's case paratextuality provides a reader an insight into an extent of Caribbean textuality and its diversity. In *No Telephone to Heaven* Cliff, for example, quotes Walcott's poem called “Jean Rhys” (NTH, 197) stressing the multi-layeredness of Caribbean textuality.

159 See Abdul R. JanMohamed (ed.) *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*, (1990).

Caribbean literature arguing that it borrows the language of the dominant world, which diminishes the minority subject (Kubayanda 1990, 250). The above-quoted lines from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* are also cited by Kubayanda who argues that Caliban "is admittedly the supreme example in the Western literature of the minority subject crushed by the language of the majority. But Caliban saves himself through a counter-discourse which 'deterritorializes' the borrowed English tongue with curses" (Kubayanda 1990, 250). I conceive Cliff's code-switching as this kind of process of deterritorialization<sup>160</sup>. The code-switching in her novels functions as a means of breaking the cycle of colonial representation by refusing to express the local subjectivity as a colonial textual construct. Caribbean identity is not articulated merely with the "Master's tools".

The "bilingualism" in Cliff's novels also reflects the Caribbean as a site of multicultural encounters. It is impossible to write about the Caribbean only in one language as the narrator of *Free Enterprise* explains:

French was the preference for some people. For a few a choice made with nostalgia for Touissant, a casting back to the great house a flame, Dessaline's "Leave nothing white alive!", Christophe's scorched earth [---] when *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, extended even to the Black Jacobines. [---]. Other enthusiasts sought sophistication, fashion, *une langue civil*, distance from the grubbiness of the trader – who knew only English. These were the sort who would construct a replica of *Sacré-Coeur* in the Martiniquaise jungle [---].

English had no such mysteriousness, revolutionary or otherwise. English was the tongue of commerce, the marketplace with its bustle and terror [---]. The business of English was business, at least in these waters.

Spanish was the language of categories. Spanish described the population of the New World under the imperial gaze. Spanish was terribly concerned with *limpieza de sangre*.

Latin described the soul. Latin transubstantiated breadfruit to flesh, rum to blood. [---]. Carib Latin did not embrace Ovid or Catullus, but brought home Jerome and Augustine and the martyrdom of St. Catherine in the unbearable bright light, which was the Carib sun.

Hebrew and Chinese and Arabic, oriental and surreptitious, kept mostly to themselves, for reasons of safekeeping, of the language and the people and their varied strangeness – to the European gaze, of course. [---].

Against these tongues African of every stripe collided. Twi and Mande and Akan and Bambara and Ewe and Fante and Ga and Anyi and Asante and Yoruba and Igbo and Bini. O ba. He comes. O bai. He came. O re ba. He is coming. O be ba. He will come. [---].

The place was a whirlwind. (FE, 6-8.)

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<sup>160</sup> This term originates from Deleuze and Guattari. Caren Kaplan uses the term in the context of Cliff research and defines it as a concept "for the displacement of identities, persons, and meanings that is endemic to the postmodern world system" (Kaplan 1990, 358). Kaplan draws on Deleuze's and Guattari's use of the term to locate the "moment of alienation and exile in language and literature" (Kaplan 1990, 358).

In this lengthy example the narrator explains the multilingualism present in Caribbean experience highlighting the diasporic processes of identity.<sup>161</sup> Religion, home, market place, and politics need different languages. Françoise Lionnet interprets the use of Patois in Cliff's fiction as a reflection of split subjectivity. In applying Darryl Dance's ideas, she writes that "there are many language forms available to the Caribbean writer, so that the question of 'which word' to use becomes inseparable from the way subjectivity is defined" (Lionnet 1992a, 327). Consequently, I would like to argue that the simple binary between dominant and minority discourse, in the form that JanMohamed formulated in the early nineties, does not illuminate the multi-discursive quality of Cliff's fiction. In the quotation cited above, Cliff's narrator emphasizes that neither minority discourse *nor* dominant discourse is homogenous and stable but constructed out of many. Colonial and local discourses which are intertwined, altering each other, and producing "the third spaces of enunciation". The language in Cliff's novels is a hybrid, creolized, and performative medium: its use of Patois is "mixing the forms taught us by the oppressor, undermining his language and co-opting his style, and turning it to our purpose" (LLB, 14). The use of language is a strategic tool for rebellion and textual resistance.

According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, decolonizing the use of language has to both abrogate the categories of imperial culture, "its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative" and to appropriate the literary language to "bear the burden of one's own cultural experience" by using strange vocabulary, syntax, and non-standard grammar (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989, 38). The aforementioned example of 'abeng' as a poly-semantic signifier exemplifies Cliff's abrogation and appropriation of the colonial language. The title of the novel "abeng" depicts the simultaneous existence of dominant and minority discourses in Jamaica. The novel *Abeng* includes explanations, etymologies, even a glossary of Patois words, to make it easier for non-Jamaican readers to understand. According to Françoise Lionnet, they reflect a "polysemic means of communication" which addresses different audiences simultaneously: its code-switching narration includes both "noises" and "messages" depending on whether the reader is Anglophone or Creolophone (Lionnet 1992a, 331). Even though code switching displays the ambivalence of postcolonial subjectivity and reality – its "duplicitous nature", as Lionnet interprets, also provides sites for multicultural communication (Lionnet 1992a, 323). The explanations and glossaries welcome the "outsider reader" to cross the cultural borders. Moreover, Lionnet uses the term "linguistic archaeology" to describe the way Cliff's narrator introduces Jamaican expressions, words, etymologies, and folkloric details to the reader (Lionnet 1992a, 340). Linguistic archaeology also becomes a site of communication with a non-Jamaican reader, while for Jamaican readers it may offer a historical perspective on their

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161 This kind of diasporic understanding of something new being created in the state of in-betweenness is well encapsulated by Sophie Lehmann. Lehman writes that "diaspora itself becomes the basis for creating culture and bridging cultural differences: The uniformity of a fixed or rigidly bounded culture is replaced by more open and mutable one in which the spaces *between* languages and countries become sites of new creation rather than marginality" (Lehmann 1998, 104). Her concept of "space between languages", I think, is the site for critical understanding of postcolonial encounters present in Cliff's fiction.

own language. Therefore, “minority discourse” used in Cliff’s novels undermines the majority-minority binarism and opens up a further means of dialogue rather than simply foregrounding the previously oppressed.

Variation in the linguistic code leaves a text open for interpretation as the logic of abrogation and appropriation disturbs the process of signification. Linguistic ‘mistakes’ act as points of dissonance and alteration, creating a potential base for “a metaphoric mode in cross-cultural writing”, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin put it (1989, 67). These dissonances, particularly if the glossaries are not used, reflect the difference of subaltern subjectivity. They remain disturbances to the reader who is unable to switch codes along with the text. Consequently, these lapses become representations of the Othered experience, which is not understood.<sup>162</sup> A similar logic of disturbance is present in *No Telephone to Heaven* as the narrator describes Jamaica using local words, Patois, broken syntax, and lists of culturally particular concepts:

Rum. Ganja. Mento. Ska. Reggae. Prayer. Singing. Jump-up. Hymns. Full-immersion baptism. Nine Night.

Nigromancy.

Early death for so many. But no relief. Many of them is sufferah. Many of them live in passion. Suffering nuh mus’ be meant for we.

Depression. Downpression. Oppression. Recession. Intercession. Comission. Omission. Missionaries.

Is nuh dry-jump dis.

All the same t’ing, mi dear. We is in Babylon. Yes, mi dear bredda. *NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN*. (NTH, 17.)

Here, the appropriation of language seems to be a political act as the local reader familiar with the concepts listed has a larger authority over the text. The practises of abrogating and appropriating language have been historically used in slave societies in order to make the spoken language difficult for masters to understand. For Cliff the code-switching and ambivalence become a revisionist strategy for textual rebellion, or ways to decolonize the language. This rebellion reflects, what Barbara Lalla articulates as *verbal marronage* unsettling the dominant discourse in a similar way to that in which Maroons unsettled colonial authorities (Lalla 1996, 195).

The uses of different Englishes are a means of expressing either difference versus sameness or suspicion versus solidarity between the characters in the writing. In the following example of code switching, the narrator of *No Telephone to Heaven* turns to Patois in order to emphasize her feelings of empathy and solidarity towards Jamaican people:

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<sup>162</sup> According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin the postcolonial writer whose “gaze is turned in two directions” is more an interpreter than an object of an interpretation (see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989, 61). The author becomes a first interpreter. The editorial intrusions such as footnotes, glossaries, and prefaces, also typical of Cliff’s novels, are examples of this. For more on the uses of linguistic appropriation in postcolonial literature, see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989, 59-77.

People could buy necessities only by marrying goods, purchasing flour - were there flour - along with a luxury, a jar of chutney, a box of Cheer. No vaccine. *But plenty-plenty* polio. Children bent up all over the place. (NTH, 187 emphasis added.)

A similar switch happens as she describes the death of Christopher's grandmother in the Kingston shanty. Christopher's point of view is mediated with Patois. Standard English does not express the experiences of this boy:

When he was eight, Christopher's grandmother died. What she thought was a touch of dropsy was in fact something else, and *her belly swell up and she gone. Him grandmother dead when him eight but him stay on in de shack. De government men tek her body away fe bury dem say and leave him dere, never once asking if him have smaddy fe care fe him.* (NTH, 40 emphasis added.)<sup>163</sup>

For Cliff's characters the code-switching also provides a means to move strategically between subject positions. In *Abeng* Clare catches two boys, Ben and Joshua, discussing at Miss Mattie's yard. The switch to Standard English is used to bolster Joshua's position of authority:

"Go on, man, get de sint'ing fe me, *nuh.*"  
"Say pretty *please.*"  
"Okay, pretty please."  
"But wanna mus' mek de fire."  
"Good, man." (A, 57 emphasis added.)

Furthermore, by using Standard English in *No Telephone to Heaven* Clare ridicules the racism of an American tourist as he bothers her and Harry/Harriet in a restaurant:

That's perfectly all right" - Clare approximated an Oxbridge accent - "perfectly ... but you see, my husband" - she paused to let the word sink in - "my husband and I" - Christ! I sound like Elizabeth II giving her Christmas message - "my husband and I are also visitors to this island... he is the crown prince of Benin, in Africa, and I am his first wife." (NTH, 125.)

Clare uses the Oxbridge accent to mock the categorizing gaze of the tourist.

The strategic use of language variation, as in the examples above, defines the postcolonial discursive space continuously anew. Linguistic processes, such as abrogation, challenge the white mythologies embedded in the colonial language. Bhabha encapsulates the idea by claiming that the colonial presence (which for him is discursive) "is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (Bhabha 1995, 107). I suggest that Cliff's literary discourse is founded on the ambivalence; it

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<sup>163</sup> See for more on the interpretation of this excerpt Raiskin 1994a, 91.



is a manifold network within which the Caribbean subjectivity gets “interpellated”, to use the Althusserian terminology, as a creolized agent.<sup>164</sup>

The creolized agency, however, must be further studied – namely, it is the question of gendered and sexualized use of language which cannot remain unaddressed when studying Cliff’s novels. Along with the challenges discussed above, her narrators seek a language that can express Caribbean homosexual identity. As the silences of colonial discourse are replenished with Patois, the local discourse is also supplemented – to address non-normative sexuality. As Isabel Hoving puts it, “the silences, breaks, and disruptions in Cliff’s text might be interpreted as an articulation of the impossibility of putting the plurality into words” (Hoving 2001, 248). The logic of breaks and silences is pinpointed in *Abeng*, when Clare asks a maid of the Savage family about homosexuality. The maid avoids the subject:

“It is when smaddy is a little off – is one sint’ing one smaddy is born with. Him no can’t help himself.” [---] “Him is battyman – him want fe lay down wit’ only other men. No ask me no more.” (A, 125.)

The issue of homosexuality demonstrates that Patois also has limits as a counter-discourse.

Later on, Clare herself needs another language with Zoe to signal their intimate relationship. They pretend to make “secret totems, in a language only they could decipher” (A, 94). Thus the supplementing code-switching in Cliff’s texts is not only applied to colonial discourse, but creates what Hoving calls “the necessity of plural speech strategy” (Hoving 2001, 234).<sup>165</sup> It is clear that the simple return to the local is not an objective of Cliff’s dialectic literary strategy. The simplistic myth of returning to origins is constantly unsettled in Cliff’s works. This is best described in her poem “Passing” from *Land of Look Behind*:

Such words conspire to make a past.  
Such words conjure a knowledge.  
Such words make assimilation impossible. They stay with you for years. They  
puzzle, but you sense a significance. *I need these words.* (LLB, 21, emphasis added.)

164 At least five different linguistic codes can be traced in Cliff’s works: British English, American English, Standard Jamaican English, Jamaican Creole, and so called Dread Talk based on Rastafarian use of the language. Dread Talk politicizes English grammar by using object forms as subjects (e.g. “Me is standin”) or using personal pronouns as object in non-object form (e.g. “Suffering nuh mus’ be meant for we” NTH, 17). Another significant feature of Dread Talk is a collective I, I an I (ai an ai). “I an I” describes the connection between a Rastaman and Jahweh, Jah. Cliff herself has written that Jah, for her, signifies “the beginning of Jamaica. I and Jamaica is who I am” (LLB, 76). For more on Dread Talk see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989, 48-9; Christie 2003, 34; Homiak 1995, passim.

165 Constance S. Richards also highlights the value of colonial languages for colonized people. They have been useful e.g. in creating Pan-African identities or anti-imperialist politics. As Richards argues, colonial languages “make possible the link between the economies of Third World states and the metropolises of transnational capital” but also a larger distribution of Asian, African, and Latin literature (Richards 2000, 8). She goes further by stating that while this literature surrenders itself to appropriation by the global market, it has actually “punctured colonial hegemony” (Richards 2000, 8).

Cliff's narrators illustrate that the intersectional subject positions are also positions of discursive polyphony.<sup>166</sup> In the first lines of the poem, "such words" are the language of Prospero which Caliban needs to learn in order to be able to curse. In the collection *Land of Look Behind* the authoritative language marks a proper expression but not self-expression. The phrase "such words" refers to taming the wildness, to control, and to linguistic "servantness". The lyrical I in the poems needs to take a "Journey into Speechlessness" in order to change the proper expression into self-expression. (See LLB, 11-7.)

Gendered discourse is a crucial axis of Cliff's polyphony. In her novels, colonial language is imbued with patriarchal ideas, and thus the language itself must be altered for feminist purposes. Code-switching, therefore, becomes a way to seek out expressions for women's experiences. The feminist use of code-switching becomes clear when Kitty asks Boy for a divorce in *No Telephone to Heaven*:

"Busha, is maybe time we cut the cotta<sup>167</sup>...what you think?" She broke the silence, addressing him as overseer, with reference to divorce among the slaves who had been among their ancestors. Slicing the device on which their burdens balanced. [---]. "Why you call me 'busha', woman? I don't drive you. I don't push you against your will." Boy, frightened.

She smiled at him. "You prefer 'slave'... 'massa'? Is what your American friends call you?" (NTH, 82.)

Kitty uses Patois to disentangle herself from their marriage and Boy's worldview. The narrator, once again, needs to act as an interpreter between the reader and Kitty's use of language within the heteroglossic<sup>168</sup> communication of the novel. Kitty's code-switching here becomes more than an act of verbal marronage discussed above; it is also *an act of feminist marronage*. Her speech becomes not only the linguistic intervention similar to the Maroon fight envisaged by Lalla, but the allegorical textual presence of Nanny's female marronage. Sophie Lehmann, in her inspiring article on Caribbean women's writing, argues that Nanny, who could catch the bullets and turn them back toward oppressor, provides "a model for the linguistic rebellion of later Caribbean women, who likewise seek to turn the oppressive aspects of English back on those

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166 Cliff's use of language unsettles the singular subject positions. This kind of subversive use of language was typical of the feminists of color of the 1980s in their identity poetical writings. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa used the metaphor of "serpent's tongue" to describe the polyphony of intersectional expressions of identity. She explains: "Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue – my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence" (Anzaldúa 1987, 59).

167 Cotta = a round cushion of cloth, used to balance burdens on the head (NTH, 210 glossary)

168 The concept of "heteroglossia" originates from the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin. In Cliff's novels, as Hoving points out, the term does not, however, mean the free heteroglossia of carnival celebrated by Bakhtin, but "there is a strife and violence between the many tongues" (Hoving 2001, 247).

who enforced its practise” (Lehmann 1998, 108-9).<sup>169</sup> I suggest that we can read this kind of linguistic and feminist marronage in Kitty’s sarcasm.

The motif of feminist linguistic marronage is widely explored in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Alone in the USA, it is a challenge for Kitty to develop a language with which she can express herself. At first she is totally out of voice or language which becomes very concrete as her Jamaican accent is metaphorically turned into “a lickie piece of gristle in me t’roat” (NTH, 76). This loss of voice illustrates Kitty’s sense of displacement and exile. Her use Patois excludes her from the circles of African Americans as well as from other immigrant communities. The narrator explains the situation: “Kitty did not speak to women around her; their accents clashed and they said they could not understand each other” (NTH, 64). Patti L. Duncan has analyzed the theme of silence in the literature of women writers of color. According to Duncan, on one hand, liberatory rhetoric has used metaphors such as “voice”, “breaking the silence” and “speaking out” to mark the aspirations to freedom “suggesting that speech itself represents liberation” (Duncan 2001, 25). On the other hand, silence has referred to oppression, even death.<sup>170</sup> In Kitty’s case, her silence symbolizes, alongside the racial and gendered subalternity, her homelessness and dislocation.

The concept of silence, or speechlessness, is an important motif throughout Cliff’s text. One must learn to break the silence, find a voice, and come out of the Kumbla, a common metaphor in Caribbean women’s writing. The Kumbla describes the state of speechlessness, but also invisibility and false safety in its ability to hide and cover. Elina Valovirta explains that the kumbla, “unexplainable and yet in need of explanation” is “a textual figure as well as an emotional, lived experience involving social psychology and elements of folklore” (Valovirta 2010, 45). In Cliff’s fiction the Kumbla, being at the same time protective and silencing, is constituted out of passing and invisibility, but also out of colonial language, white mythologies, and heteronormativity. The Kumbla also becomes Kitty’s challenge in *No Telephone to Heaven*, and she must learn how to “break out of the Kumbla”<sup>171</sup>, that is to say, learn how to express herself. I would

169 Denise deCaires Narain uses the term “Body Talk” to metaphorize the gendered expression in Caribbean women’s writing. She juxtaposes the body talk to *écriture féminine* which the French feminists, and particularly Hélène Cixous, used to describe the language “which mobilized the whole new economy of symbols” (deCaires Narain 1998, 255) producing gendered writing. For deCaires Narain, Body Talk is something which seeks to undermine both patriarchal and colonial ways of writing by a range of strategies, namely mimicry, mockery, irreverence, polyphony, transgression of grammar, and punning. Body talk highlights presence of voice providing an illusion of a speaking subject using voice as a metonymy of body. Body talk is a discursive tool to unsettle stereotypical representations of the colonized woman. (See deCaires Narain 1998, 255-7.) Thus, following deCaires Narain, I will argue that for Cliff rebellion is founded on more than the alteration of language which produces stereotypical images; she also creates new images.

170 For example gay and lesbian liberatory movements have circulated slogans such as “Speaking out” or “Breaking the Silence”, and finally AIDS activists made known that “Silence = Death” (see Duncan 2001, 25; and Huttunen & al. 2008, xiv – xv).

171 See Carole Boyce Davies & Elaine Fido Savory (eds.), *Out of the Kumbla. Caribbean Women and Literature*. Trenton: Africa World Press. As Boyce Davies and Fido Savory explain ‘Out of the Kumbla’ signifies “for us a movement from confinement to visibility, articulation, process. As process, it allows for a multiplicity of moves, exteriorized, no longer contained and protected or dominated. ‘Out of the Kumbla’ is as well a sign for departure from constricting and restricting spaces. It further signifies the taking of control and above all locating ourselves at a different vantage point from which to view the landscape” (Davies & Savory 1990, 19). For more on further analysis of the Kumbla in Caribbean women’s writing see Valovirta 2010, 45-65.

like to argue that Cliff's early works such as *Claiming an Identity*, *Abeng*, and *Land of Look Behind* are more focused on the revealing of the processes of constructing these Kumblas in the colonized Caribbean reality, while her later works are more concerned with the breaking out of the Kumbla. The process they are depicting is not so much "a journey into speechlessness" but a journey towards speech.<sup>172</sup>

However, Kitty's speechlessness in the United States has yet another level, namely a refusal to speak. As Duncan argues, there are "qualitative distinctions between being silent and being silenced" (Duncan 2001, 29). In Kitty's case silence highlights the gaps of dominant discourse, as the narrator in *Abeng* explains: "It was the silence that was Kitty's finest weapon" (A, 131).<sup>173</sup> In *History of Sexuality* Foucault considers silence as productive; it is a factor of discourse, which also functions productively like a discourse. For Foucault "silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name [---] – is less the absolute limit of discourse [---] than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies" (Foucault 1990, 27). Kitty's silence in New York signifies simultaneously the silencing mechanisms of dominant discourse and her rebellious refusal of the norms embedded in Boy's discourse.

Later, in New York, Kitty gets a job in a laundry. One of her tasks is to bury advertisements, little notes including washing tips, into white customers' clean laundry. These notes are signed by a fictional "Mrs. White", an imaginary model house-wife created by the owner of the laundry, Mr. B:

Mrs. White and her philosophy of laundry, and thus her philosophy of wifehood, of which laundry was but one office, was the creation of Mr. B. Describing in his quaint sweet language that it was wife's duty to make her husband's shirts, their crispness and their stiffness, a matter of her primary concern. That it was part of her mission to assure "sanitary sheets to bless the slumber of your loved ones." That a woman might be held to account if her tablecloth showed tattletale grey. (NTH, 73.)<sup>174</sup>

Kitty has two African-American co-workers, Virginia and Georgia, in the laundry. These women, however, do not accept Kitty as one of "their own kind". They have internalized certain beliefs about skin-color, and automatically assume that Kitty with her lighter skin belongs to the world of the white laundry owners. They are separated by the traditional color-line:

172 The speech is foreseen in the poem from *Land of Look Behind* (1985) called "The Laughing Mulatto (Formerly a Statue) Speaks". The lyrical I in the poem is a white marble statue who learns how to speak. The preface explaining Cliff's own literary guidelines for the collection *If I Could Write This in Fire* (2008), including a re-publication of *Land of Look Behind*, is now called "Journey into Speech" not into "Speechlessness" as in original version from 1985.

173 As Duncan explains, silence performs in different functions and "produces distinct interpretations in various contexts. [---]. "As a will to unsay, it is also that which makes speaking or saying possible, as it constructs and shapes meaning" (Duncan 2001, 39). I agree with Duncan who emphasizes that we have not listened enough to this language of silence, its resonances of possibility.

174 Kitty's job in a laundry underlines and parodies two theoretical tropes cultivated by postcolonial theory. On the one hand it refers to a metaphor of "white-washing" used to describe the process of legitimating of white ideals. On the other hand, I suggest, it refers to trope "identities in a whirlpool" which many scholars use to illustrate the shifting and processual nature of cultural identities.

Kitty wanted to smash what was between them, the three of them, and shout “Me not dem!”, the other them. She wanted to tell the women what had prevailed, who she really was, but she could not and held back, afraid of what they might think of her, knowing their own travels through the city would make her seem only like a cry-cry baby. A house-slave inconvenienced by massa whim, while dem worked the cane. (NTH, 77.)

Kitty’s diasporic identity is fragmented and shifting, her loyalties are misinterpreted. As Ramchandran Sethuraman argues, her subjectivity “compels us to view the way subjects are interpellated in discourse not in the unitary fashion outlined by Althusser but in a way that acknowledges a heterogeneous semantic field where the inflections of subjectivity are multiple, conflictual, interchangeable, and often contradictory” (Sethuraman 1997, 268). As a Creole woman, Kitty cannot enter the motel owned by a bigot, but in a New York laundry she gives voice to Mrs. White and is lumped together with the owner class. Kitty feels insecure, she “seems to float” (NTH, 75) in a state of in-betweenness.

Homi K. Bhabha calls *pedagogical* the type of discourse which considers people as objects of nationalist pedagogy and “is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin” (Bhabha 1995, 145). This pedagogical discourse founds itself on “ideological manoeuvres through which imagined communities are given essentialist identities” (149) and is “iterated as a reproductive process” (145). In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the pedagogy of Mrs. White teaches women to be better mothers and house-wives by positioning them as the reproductive subjects who can build the nation. Kitty loses her own identity when voicing the pedagogy of Mrs. White. Mr. B fashions an image of Mrs. White who has “gentle gray curls, pink skin, two places on either cheek, where the pink deepened slightly, soft round bosom, small mouth” and her lips “indicating a smile” (NTH, 74). Mrs. White was “such an American image”, a woman with wisdom, presence, and good nature (NTH, 73). Moreover, for Mr. B “the word *sanitary* was important, a keystone” in Mrs. White’s notes (NTH, 73) hinting at Mr. B’s racism. The national, patriarchal, and somewhat racist pedagogy does not leave any room for Kitty. She loses her language of self-expression and, as the narrator explains, uses “her voice only as Mrs. White, or as the office’s quiet girl” (NTH, 74).

Nonetheless, Bhabha aims to define tools for confronting the defining power of pedagogical discourse. He calls *performative* the supplementary discourse of minorities emerging from the liminal movement of the culture of the nation (Bhabha 1995, 155). The interrogative power of performative discourse renders the pedagogical discourse ambivalent as it “interrogates its object by initially withholding its objective. Insinuating itself into the terms of reference of the dominant discourse, the supplementary antagonizes the implicit power to generalize, to produce the sociological solidity” (Bhabha 1995, 155). I suggest that the use of rebellious counter-discourses in Cliff’s novels could be juxtaposed with the performative, interrogative liminal discourse defined by Bhabha. To speak as a Creole/lesbian woman, Cliff must unravel the hegemony of the pedagogical discourse. Performative and pedagogical discourses are more often than not situated in a dialogue which emphasizes their interplay rather than oppositiona-

lity. While Kitty's performative and rebellious speech confronts Boy's pedagogical language, it is left to Clare to question their antithetical positions.

Kitty's voice re-emerges as she finds a way of dismantling the pedagogy of Mrs. White. She creates her own character Mrs. Black, and starts to forge instruction notes. The intrusion of Mrs. Black represents "the supplementary and antagonizing performative" as she writes: "EVER TRY CLEANSING YOUR MIND OF HATRED? THINK OF IT" (NTH, 78), "WE CLEAN YOUR CLOTHES BUT NOT YOUR HEART", or "WHITE PEOPLE CAN BE BLACK-HEARTED" (NTH, 81). Kitty's rebellious words radicalize the subtle ideology of the pedagogical. Even though the sly conservatism is no less violent, it easily remains unrecognized if it is not countered with such urgency.<sup>175</sup> In this sense, I agree with Antonia MacDonald-Smythe who argues that counter-discourse in Cliff's writing is a "maternal tongue" emerging from the "romantic envisioning of female community" (MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 114). Finally Kitty is ready to write back as she declares: "HELLO. MRS. WHITE IS DEAD. MY NAME IS MRS. BLACK. I KILLED HER" (NTH, 83).<sup>176</sup> Kitty's actions have, however, unwanted consequences: Georgia and Virginia are the ones who get fired. As a Creole woman, she has privileges the most marginalized people lack. As Kitty confesses to Mr. B, he just states: "Nice girl like you? Don't be crazy [---] no, I can't believe that" (NTH, 84).

In postcolonial studies, concepts such as linguistic code-switching, a speaking subject, and a rebellious/minority/counter discourse illustrate its emancipatory aim.<sup>177</sup> This kind of "speaking literature" is part of the de-colonizing process which aims at re-constituting the subaltern experience and countering white mythologies present in language. In Cliff's novels, orature often has a feminist ethos, recognizing the "women's bilinguality", as Mary Chamberlain puts it (Chamberlain 1995, 96). To conclude, I would like to argue that Cliff's novels are structured as what Henry Louis Gates Jr. would call "speakerly texts", that is texts which incorporate structures of oral tradition and the local orthography in order to form a dialogue with the Western novel form and which constitutes a rebellious minority discourse.<sup>178</sup> This combination

175 Kitty's voice as Mrs. Black illustrates what Mae Gwendolyn Henderson calls as "discursive diversity" of black women's writing. She analyzes the interlocutory language the black women need in order to express their intersectional cultural position "reflecting not only a relationship with the 'other(s)' but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity" (Henderson 1990, 118). Henderson applies Bakhtinian ideas about heteroglossia to describe a dialogic subjectivity expressed in the writings of women of color.

176 Judith Raiskin makes a very important observation in analyzing this scene as she argues that despite her radical counter-discourse Kitty remains stuck with white mythologies of English language. Her provocations are still based on the dualism of white/good versus black/evil. She is unable to deconstruct the conventional hierarchies and uses e.g. the term "Black-hearted" as a synonym for evil (Raiskin 1994a, 91-2). For more on Kitty's inner dialogue, and the plurality of discourses in Cliff's novels, see also Elia 2001, 48-52.

177 These kinds of literary interpretations about postcolonial voice and agency might also generate problems. I agree with Carine Mardorossian who warns postcolonial scholars of celebrating representations of subaltern insurgency and its unsettling effects. She claims that "as a result, their determination to detect these sites of resistance often obscures the power relations in which the subaltern voices are imbricated" (Mardorossian 2005, 21).

178 For more on "speakerly texts" see Gates 1988, xxiii-xxvi and Wilentz 1992, xvii, xxii. For Gates, "speakerly texts" are typical in African American literary tradition. They are "double-voiced texts" using modes of figuration from black vernacular in the context of German and Romance literary structures. With the unique use of free indirect discourse, repetition, revision, and transcribed dialect they create the illusion of a speaker within the text.

enables the expression of postcolonial, hybrid, experience. Cliff's feminist verbal marronage appropriates and abrogates the dominant pedagogical (e.g. colonial, patriarchal) discourse. The verbal marronage becomes a site of agency of the diasporic and spoken subject surrounded by colonial narratives. These speakerly texts have the potential of becoming tools for self-reflection which is no longer blurred by imperial mythologies – thus providing a breeding ground for counter-narrative.





## 4. Caribbean Counter-History and Feminist Mythology

In the previous chapter I argued that, within the imperial reality, the colonizing mythos acts pedagogically, by emerging as objective knowledge. My aim in this chapter is to examine how Michelle Cliff's novels negotiate colonial meanings by (en)countering the colonizing mythos with counter-myths and stories of resistance. Her narratives create alternative myths in order to constitute postcolonial consciousness, rebellious histories, and collective memories. They are means of reconstructing "memories of the future"<sup>179</sup> for Caribbean women whose past has disappeared from the hegemonic archives, but who need a collective historical consciousness for a postcolonial future. As Cliff's counter-mythos re-interprets the past, it simultaneously creates historical spaces for subaltern identities: her narration creates re-imagined Caribbean rites, folklore, aspects of traditional healing culture and characters involved in the heritage of resistance. She writes the subaltern subjects into being by letting them re-possess history.

I suggest that these rebellious representations operate as "questions interrupting the voice of command that arise from the heterogeneous sites" (Bhabha 1995, 116). They are "the other scene" which breaks down the "symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside" (Bhabha 1995, 116). Yet, Cliff's "other scene" seems to be more polyphonic than a mere negotiation between the colonizer and the colonized. In this chapter, I will analyze how counter-narratives in Cliff's novels are intersectional, creolized, gendered, and even queered. I am to map the kinds of counter-discourses Cliff creates, and examine how they de-colonize Caribbean histories thereby constituting sites for subaltern subjects. Furthermore, I suggest that, in Cliff's novels, the counter-myths appear as a discourse abrogating the power of white mythologies thereby providing rebellious knowledge for colonized subjects.

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179 "Memory of the future" is a term used by many Caribbeanists following Edouard Glissant's original ideas presented in his foundational study *Le Discours antillais* (1981). In this study he examines the concept of time in several Caribbean novels and finds that many of them utilize cyclic or spiral conceptualizations of time within which the past becomes constituted as a future. In her study M.M. Adjarian finds similar cycles in Cliff's novels (see Adjarian 2000).

#### 4.1. Daughters of Caliban: Hybrid Myths as Counter-Narratives

I suggest that Cliff's narratives present counter-stories and white mythologies in a strategic dialogue contesting the rationale of one singular (colonial) *mythos*. The dialogue unsettles the idea of the singular nature of "truth" forcing the reader to acknowledge the polyphonic nature of postcolonial, culturally changing rationales. In this section, I will examine how this polyphony is created in Cliff's novels. It is important to recognize what happens to white mythologies when they are dislocated in strange contexts, for example in Caribbean culture. In other words, I am interested in the question of how the hybrid *mythos* interrupts the authority of the pedagogical. My hypothesis is that Cliff's narration poses different sets of values against each other, presents them to the reader in the way which they are interrelated, changing each other and overlapping to the point where the binarisms of history/fiction or the dominant/resistant rationales do not exist anymore. For Clare and Annie, it seems to be this kind of hybridized counter-mythos which provides them a way towards "an identity they were taught to despise".<sup>180</sup> According to Kathleen Renk, Cliff's narratives rip away the "camouflaging mythology to reveal the histories of cross-cultural characters who are able to resist even while being exploited and are able to gain control over their own bodies" (Renk 1999, 72). The narration does not only reveal what has been hidden from the grand narratives of history but also conjures up rebellious characters, such as Nanny of the Maroons, and events, such as secret rituals and ceremonies, in order to reconstruct the memories for the Caribbean multifocal future.

I will now move forward from the argument that Cliff's narration uses indigenous myths and symbols as a decolonizing strategy. I am more interested in the ways in which she adapts the legitimated, pedagogical discourse in order to abrogate its meaning. Such abrogation is often done by "adapting Europe's defining tales" (Boehmer 1995, 205). According to John Thieme, it is not uncommon for postcolonial literature to circulate subtexts, or "pretexts" to use Thieme's terms, about Western myths and canonized literary texts. Characters such as Robinson Crusoe, Faust, or Prospero symbolizing Western values – like rationality, thirst for knowledge, individual success, and domination of one's environment – are often material for adaptations. Thieme explains that especially early anticolonialist counter-narratives switched the roles of canonized characters in such a way that the master became the slave, the traitor became the hero, or a minor character became the protagonist. (See Thieme 2002, 1-14 and Hakkarainen 2000,

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<sup>180</sup> In this context I would like to elicit Anuradhan Dingewaney Needham's book *Using the Master's Tools* (2000), in which she analyzes the themes of resistance and authenticity. She comes to the conclusion which criticizes the oppositionality of power and resistance claiming that "no modes of resistance, whether they acknowledge it or not, are completely free of their implication in the domination they resist" (Needham 2000, 10). In a Foucauldian sense, the resistant discourse is already included in the legitimate discourse. The elements of resistance are constructed from within, as Needham argues, "out of the elements of the very system of domination" (Needham 2000, 10-11). Interestingly enough, Needham uses Cliff's writing in order to demonstrate her ideas. I agree with Needham as she explains that, as a light-skinned Creole, Clare does not just "posses" the revolutionary consciousness but she needs to acquire it while living within the dominant system (see Needham 2000, 93-97). In Clare's case, I think, the resistance is not to be found "outside" the dominant system but it is a *resistant position dialectically related to oppression*.

296-7.)<sup>181</sup> Cliff's narrators also utilize these kinds of switchings in order to describe the cultural whirlwind of the transnational Caribbean. These strategically rewritten "defining tales" displace the European heritage by making it include alien elements and thus unsettling their cultural authority. In Cliff's novels the cultural tradition is constantly created anew.<sup>182</sup> For Cliff Jupiter and Zeus for example, are not honorable Gods but exploitative oppressors (NTH 138, 140), and the Golden Age of Antiquity is not a period of wisdom and philosophy but a violent era of slavery. Harry/Harriet comments on the education s/he had in school:

Dem nuh tell us what to think? But, even so...even with them talk about golden age this and Platonic love that, I couldn't...my twelve-year-old self couldn't comprehend why it so golden if dem keep slave... if dem women lock up so. Why Jamaica den nuh golden, eh? (NTH, 123.)

The self-explanatory nature of canonized stories is questioned. Western mythology is rendered adaptable and therefore potentially subversive.

Caribbean literature, in particular, has re-worked "trans-Atlantic" mythical stories such as Columbus accidentally finding West Indies, or Robinson Crusoe starting an island colony, or Ulysses crossing the seas. However, it is *The Tempest* (1610) by Shakespeare which is the most commonly used mythical subtext in Caribbean literature and literary studies.<sup>183</sup> Aimé Césaire, for instance, revises the story of Caliban in his play *Une Tempest* (1969), George Lamming in *Pleasures of Exile* (1960), or Elizabeth Nunez in *Prospero's Daughter* (2006) to name a few. Prospero's books have been seen as a metaphor of colonialism while Caliban's oppressed language has been interpreted to symbolize the voice of the colonized. As Bill Ashcroft claims in his study *Caliban's Voice* (2009) "in the relationship between Prospero, Miranda, Ariel and Caliban we find demonstrated in dramatic form some of the most fundamental features of the colonial enterprise" (17) while "the conflict between Prospero's Art and Caliban's Natural Man remains central" (18). It is Caliban's curse which seems to be the locus of Caribbean counter-discourse.

Carine Mardorossian claims that in many studies concerning Caribbean rewritings of canonical Western myths and stories the focus has been on writing against colonial culture as (Mardorossian 2005, 7). I agree with Mardorossian who goes further to argue that the Caribbean revisions also illustrate how the authors write "from within or in symbiosis with" the dominant

<sup>181</sup> For more on myths in postcolonial literature see also Ahokas 2000 and Hakkarinen 2000 *passim*.

<sup>182</sup> According to Rumina Seth the concept of tradition per se is always already political. "Tradition" is neither a fixed nor an authentic entity but "repeatedly shaped and restructured to suit the prevailing political temper" (Seth 1999, 19). Tradition is a mobile signifier which is used to support national coherence or cultural ideals, for example Robinson Crusoe promoting the values of protestant ethics. Seth quotes to Geeta Kapur who uses the term "tradition-in-use" to refer how a tradition is constantly improvised to suit political expediency (see Seth 1999, 20 n. 53). I would like to argue that this is also true as far as Cliff is concerned. In her novels the tradition is in use and utilized to constitute a de-colonizing consciousness.

<sup>183</sup> See e.g. Fanon 1986 (1952), Wynter 1990, Cartelli 1995, Petersson 1996, Kutzinski 1997, Edmondson 1999, Strachan 2002, Thieme 2002, Goldberg 2004, Ashcroft 2009, or Consuelo López Springfield (ed.) 1997, *Daughters of Caliban. Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana UP. See for the revisions of *The Tempest* also Richards 2000, 14-24 and Caribbean revisions of Western canonic literature Mardorossian 2005. The amount of literary scholarly work written about "calibanism" in Caribbean literature is endless; the names above are only but a thin sliver of the cake.

discourse and “envision the future by questioning the terms in which the colonial past has been cast rather than by reacting against it” (Mardorossian 2005; 7, 8). In Cliff’s writing, I think, the process of questioning the terms is more of an issue than a mere reaction to canonical stories. If we are to consider *No Telephone to Heaven* as a revision of *The Tempest*, as Thomas Cartelli does in his incisive article “After *The Tempest*: Shakespeare, Postcoloniality, and Michelle Cliff’s New, New World Miranda” (1995), the novel reaches new revisionary levels as a hybrid mythological counter-narrative. I agree with Cartelli who suggests that Cliff goes beyond the existing revisions of the play based merely on Caliban’s cursing voice, because she reconstructs feminist versions of Caliban’s speech (see Cartelli 1995 *passim*). Even though Cliff identifies herself with both Caliban and Ariel in her aims to depict Caribbean experience (Cliff 1990, 264)<sup>184</sup>, Clare Savage’s character can be read as a much more complicated allusion in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Clare’s identity process also includes Western, European, feminist, and sexual aspects. Although Clare names herself as Caliban (NTH, 116) in the novel, I concur with Cartelli who explores Clare as a revised Miranda figure, Prospero’s white daughter (Cartelli 1995, 91). While Boy Savage becomes a Prospero-like bearer of hegemonic knowledge who teaches Clare to believe in his white mythologies, it is for Miranda/Clare to learn how to question his truth through her political awakening. Like Miranda, Clare loses her maternal affiliation as she grows up in the shadow of her father’s rationale. Miranda/Clare has an inescapable, creolized element within her which cannot be overwritten by merely turning her into Caliban, she is, as Cartelli claims, “a product of Western experience, education, and indoctrination” (Cartelli 1995, 91) combining the ethos of both Prospero and Caliban. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare becomes a rewritten Miranda whose agency is not overruled by her father. Her challenge is to find a balance between Prospero’s language and Caliban’s curse, to question the binary between Prospero’s Art and Caliban’s Nature. While Clare finds her revolutionary speech, she ceases to be only Prospero’s daughter, and becomes Miranda/Caliban thus ‘creolizing’ both positions.

It is significant that the oft-quoted binary between Prospero and Caliban is feminized in Cliff’s narration. It is Clare/Miranda’s female body which hovers between their positions. For Sylvia Wynter, it is the absence of Caliban’s woman, or a Caliban-Woman, which has marked Caribbean literature. Much has been written after 1990 about Caliban-Women, when Wynter published her path-breaking essay “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/Silencing the Demonic Ground of Caliban’s Woman”, nevertheless her considerations remain helpful for understanding Cliff’s novels. For Wynter the absence of Caliban’s woman represents the ontological absence of the Caribbean woman from the dominant discourse – thus presenting a white woman (Miranda) as the only acceptable object of Caliban’s desire (Wynter 1990; 363, 361). According to Wynter, Miranda becomes an object of desire even though she still is a subject of speech because of her position as Prospero’s daughter. Unlike Cliff in *No Telephone to Heaven*,

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<sup>184</sup> Thirteen years later in her essay “Caliban’s Daughter”, Cliff complicates the situation by naming herself as Caliban, Ariel, and as grand-daughter of Sycorax, Caliban’s mother in *The Tempest* by Shakespeare. Moreover, she connects herself with “precolonial female, landscape I(s)land: I land” (Cliff 2003, 157).

Wynter does not seem to acknowledge Miranda as “one of our own”, as she demands that contemporary literature should create a brand new Caliban’s woman.<sup>185</sup> This might be considered as Wynter’s reluctance to recognize whiteness as part of the Caribbean tradition. Her views contrast sharply with Cliff’s counter-narration which emphasizes the creolized nature of all aspects of the region. Like Jonathan Goldberg, whose analysis of Cliff’s versions of *The Tempest* leads him to claim that Cliff’s ambiguous racial/sexual subject position is “Caliban” (Goldberg 2004, 71), I think Cliff makes visible a relational, rather than an oppositional model of Caribbean identity.<sup>186</sup>

As stated above, Cliff’s counter-narration is seldom unequivocal. I am particularly interested in Harry/Harriet’s ambivalent, queer characterization. In Cartelli’s analysis, Harry/Harriet is juxtaposed with the androgynous fairy, Ariel (Cartelli 1995, 92). They are both, for example, forced to cross-dress during the narration in order to serve the master’s purposes. Harry/Harriet shares the experiences of violence, oppression, and abuse with Ariel, illustrating an even more complex assemblage of power systems in colonial reality. They both represent “volatile bodies”, to use Elizabeth Grosz’s terms, producing a marginal corporeality (Grosz 1994). Their volatility abrogates the colonial, binary gender-system, and therefore they could be said to symbolize “the bodily other scene”<sup>187</sup> beyond Prospero’s meaning. That is to say, they provide models for other kinds of corporealities than those legitimated by Western rationale. I agree with Cartelli who argues that “with respect to such concerns as underclass deracination, dissident sexualities, and feminist self-assertion” (Cartelli 1995, 94), Cliff’s rewritings of the roles of Caliban<sup>188</sup>, Ariel, and Miranda move beyond earlier Caribbean rewritings of *The Tempest*, such as those by George Lamming or Aimé Césaire. In *Free Enterprise*, Shakespeare himself becomes transformed into a counter-myth as a character called Shakespeare II. In Carville, Annie tells a story about a Jamaican pan-Africanist Shakespeare II who produced yearly a version of the play by his British namesake. One year he chose Alexander Bedward, reminiscent of Touissant L’Ouverture, for a role of Caliban in order to teach rebellious history to Jamaicans.<sup>189</sup>

185 See also Cartelli’s reflections of Wynter’s essay (Cartelli 1995, 97). Cartelli seems to agree with Wynter that the absence of Caliban’s woman is repeated in *No Telephone to Heaven*. However, the strong presence of Nanny the Maroon warrior in Cliff’s fiction could be read as a presence of Caliban’s woman – at least Nanny characterizes Sycorax-like presence of a powerful female magic. See for Nanny/Sycorax parallel in Cliff’s fiction also Goldberg 2004, 79-81).

186 The idea of “relational Caribbean identity” is drawn on Carine M. Mardorossian. As Mardorossian analyzes extensive numbers of Caribbean literature which are based on the rewritings of canonical Western novels, she comes to the conclusion that they highlight a Caribbean sensibility “that replaces divisiveness with multiplicity” and “recognize alternative epistemologies” (Mardorossian 2005, 10 & 11).

187 I consciously connect the body with Bhabha’s idea of the “other scene”, because Bhabha consistently leaves out both gendered and bodily aspects from his theorizing.

188 Cartelli’s analysis of the presence of Caliban figure in *No Telephone to Heaven* is extensive. He, for example considers both Bobby, Clare’s boyfriend in Europe, and Christopher, a Jamaican orphaned boy, as Caliban figures (see Cartelli 1995, 92-3). While I agree with Cartelli, I also want to emphasize Clare’s role as a hybrid, female Caliban-esque figure.

189 Alexander Bedward (1859-1930) is known in Jamaica as a prophet of the Revivalist Movement and a traditional healer. Revivalism had its strongest foothold in Jamaica in the 1860s. Revivalism is a local syncretic religion connecting Christian and pan-Africanist Myal features. In his sermons and teachings, Bedward emphasized black resistance and the replacement of white power. Bedward died in a mental facility in 1930 where he was locked up because of his teachings. For more on Alexander Bedward see Chevannes 1995a, 6-9.

The example of *The Tempest* shows that the re-narrations of canonized stories and myths highlight the iterative nature of histories, and thus the mobility of cultural identities based on those histories. As Pirjo Ahokas argues, (re)narrated identities have neither a coherent core nor an essential foundation as presumed by identity politics (Ahokas 2000, 264). Rather, they are constituted performatively as a protagonist (or a narrator) subversively iterates familiar and conventional stories (ibid). In Cliff's case the subversive nature of her counter-myths becomes foregrounded as the author grants the most vital roles to outcasts, dissidents, revolutionaries, or spiritual leaders such as Harry/Harriet, John Brown, Mary Ellen Pleasant, Nanny of the Maroons, or the obeah-healer Mma Alli. Cliff's revisionist mythmaking can best be described as a strategy of disruption or to quote Mae Hendersson "a break with conventional semantics" (Henderson 1990, 136). I argue that Cliff's counter-mythos is reminiscent of the dialectics which, according to Henderson, are typical of the black women writers' literary tradition. The break with conventional semantics is "followed by a rewriting or a rereading of the dominant story, resulting in a delegitimation of the prior story or a *displacement which shifts attention to the other side of the story*" (Henderson 1990, 136 emphasis added). I suggest that the displacement, like Miranda/Clare's rebellious and feminist agency, renders the canonical myths re-iterated, subverts them, and strips them their seeming "originality". Canonical myths are mimicked on the other scene.

The multiple usages of *The Tempest* in postcolonial literature clarify the much discussed ideas of originality and mimicry within Caribbean literary studies. In his famous essay "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry" (1974), Derek Walcott states that it is actually the use of mimicry which constitutes the originality of Caribbean culture. Mimicry for him is an act of imagination needed for creativity. Walcott criticizes V.S. Naipaul who has stated that "nothing has ever been created in the West Indies, and nothing will ever be created" (qtd. in Walcott 1974, 8-9), because the Caribbeans are "mimic men", doomed to repeat the habits of others. For Walcott, Caribbean originality arises from creative mimicry which is vital, signifying survival rather than surrendering (Walcott 1974, 12-13; see also Olaniyan 1999, 200-4).<sup>190</sup> For Cliff, the use of mimicry is a way of hybridizing the colonizing tradition to suit the needs of the colonized. As her narrators keep referring to Dickens, Shakespeare, Columbus, Heathcliff, Madame Bovary, or Bertha Mason, the reader realizes that it is impossible to avoid European textuality in order to describe the particularities of Caribbean culture. Clare, for example, identifies herself with Pip Purring (A, 36), the Creole woman Bertha Mason (NTH, 116), *Ivanhoe's* dark Rebecca (A, 72), and the Jewish Anne Frank (A, 72). Her identity narratives prove to be as multifaceted, mimicked, and modified as Caribbean culture. These acts of narrative syncretism in Cliff's novels illustrate what Boehmer calls "the impurity of influence in postcolonial writing" (Boehmer

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190 Walcott's ideas on mimicry remind those further developed by Bhabha. For Bhabha the concept of mimicry is a subversive tool which has power to change and appropriate the authority of colonial discourse. Mimicry, however, always fails to reproduce its target, thus rendering the target ambivalent. According to Bhabha, the target becomes "an ironic compromise" constructed around ambivalence. Colonial mimicry produces subjects of difference that are "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 1995, 86).

1995, 203). It becomes clear that Cliff's decolonizing strategy cannot be seen as based on mere nostalgia of a romanticized past but on mixing or co-opting several cultural myths which, as narrative acts, illustrate the multiple contrasts of postcolonial reality.

Postcolonial writing has reversed and mimicked various types of myths foundational in colonial discourse. Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Gareth Griffiths have registered many such myths. First of all, they name the geographical myth opposing the centre and the margin. The scholars emphasize that there is no place where "the centre" could be located, not even in London or the Buckingham Palace (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1995, 213). Secondly, they mention myths concerning the ethnicity of "others", hiding the fact that Western whiteness is an ethnicity. The thirdly, colonially foundational myth is a myth concerning the origins of nations (the Volkgeist) – which is particularly problematic in the West Indian "radically dislocated culture" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1995, 213 and 183-4). I suggest, however, that the binary rational/magic should be concerned as this kind of colonizing myth. The colonial rationale aims to hide its own mythical sides in order to name the other *epistemes* as 'magic'.

In *Free Enterprise*, Annie struggles with this duality. Her challenge is to question the colonial myths in order to recognize both rational and fantastic sides in cultural stories, whether colonizing or colonized, in a hybrid manner. For her the process of reconsideration is hard and violent. Mary Ellen tries to help her question the knowledge learned in school. She tells Annie a (counter)story of a mythic African Creole woman in New Orleans, named Annie Christmas, on whom "no one would have dared slap any chains" (FE, 26). It is told that after Annie's death her "twelve sons put her body on her barge, and all thirteen of them drifted down the river and out to the Caribbean and were never seen again" (FE, 27). Maybe, as Mary Ellen hints, they went back to Africa. Annie is not ready to believe in her namesake's legend in the beginning of the novel. After the story she bursts out to Mary Ellen:

"Of course. And imaginary."  
 "Why can't you allow yourself to believe in her?"  
 "Because she is unbelievable."  
 "If so many can believe in that other twelve and their divine center, water into wine, rolling back the stone, rising up, take-up-thy-bed-and-walk, Lazarus, why can't you believe in her?" (FE, 27.)

Annie speaks according to her internalized sense of rationality. For her this warrior woman, juxtaposed with Jesus and his disciples, is imaginary, whereas Mary Ellen is ready to see other mythologies.<sup>191</sup>

191 Gloria Anzaldúa considers Western mythologies as tragic to "Others". According to her, "the official reality of rational reasoning mode" considered "the most developed consciousness" has forced the other forms of knowing to wither away (Anzaldúa 1987, 36-7). Anzaldúa considers myths as political tools. This also applies to Cliff's fiction. For Anzaldúa the myths might be turned into modes of manipulation as they are constitutive foundations of particular culture. White mythologies have an ability to 'whitewash' culturally specific identities by creating generalizations and stereotypes. For Anzaldúa, this is the reason why it is extremely important to 'Others' to create counter-mythologies. She says in an interview with AnaLouise Keating that "Myths and fictions create reality and these myths and fictions are used against women and against certain races to control, regulate, and manipulate us. I'm rewriting the myths, using the myths back against oppressors" (Anzaldúa 2000, 219; see also 229 and 238).



In addition to the twelve disciples, Cliff's narrators revise the mythical character of Christopher Columbus. The myth concerning his character and role as a 'discoverer' of the Caribbean becomes creolized and hybridized in Cliff's novels. In *Abeng*, the narrator re-invents him as a Jew who kept log in Hebrew (A, 67). The Jewish version is carried on to *Free Enterprise* in which Rachel de Souza, a Marrano Jew, tells a story about the Marranos following Columbus "at a discreet distance" in order to find asylum for themselves (FE, 60). In these stories, Don Cristóbal Colón, or Cohen in Hebrew (A, 67), is turned into a refugee and one of the "Sephardic Jews forced to hide their religion – and their identity" (A, 67). He is no longer a messenger of the King and a cultural hero, but an alien on the run. As these two mythical registers intertwine, Columbus appears as a hybrid figure, who "breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside" (Bhabha 1995, 116) thereby unsettling the boundaries of mythical authority. The canonized myth is rendered polyphonic and turned into a signifier of textual rebellion. In *Free Enterprise*, the myth of discovering America is also told in another way. The narrator tells a story about a leper locked in an iron mask who is washed ashore in Mississippi:

But what if this hypothetical, hungry, thirsty, being-driven-crazy man made landfall at the mouth of the Mississippi, or washed ashore like Robinson Crusoe, or Prospero, and begun walking across the landscape of the United States of America in search of a black blacksmith, leaving a trail of fingers and toes in his wake. (FE, 37.)

This version highlights that the "discovery" does not mean the journey of Culture and Enlightenment but a crusade of sickness and contamination.

The woman with twelve sons and the Jewish Columbus are important symbols in Cliff's hybridized trans-Atlantic myths which alter the authorized versions. However, her novels also present another kind of trans-Atlantic mythology, namely "myths of return"<sup>192</sup> invoking African-American *mythos* of resistance. These myths adapt the folklore about flying Africans which are widely known around the Caribbean, but has also been utilized by many African-American authors, for example by Toni Morrison in her novel *Song of Solomon* (1977) or by Toni Cade Bambara in her novel *The Salt Eaters* (1980). According to this myth only those who did not eat salt could rise in the air. The stories about slaves flying back to Africa, and thus to freedom, are part of the orally transmitted corpus of folklore recently studied by anthropologists, folklorists, as well as literary scholars.<sup>193</sup> Another version of the same myth tells about Igbo who returned to Africa by walking over the sea – this version has been made famous for example by Paule Marshall in her novel *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983). The mythology concerning Flying Africans

<sup>192</sup> As a concept the myth of return originates to Mircea Eliade's philosophy, but the term has been widely used in studies concerning African American literature. It refers to the repatriation to Africa after the slavery.

<sup>193</sup> See for more on the myth of flying Africans, for example, Walters 1997, Gysin 1999, Reyes 2002 and Wilentz 1992, in more ethnographic terms, see Littlewood 1995. According to Wendy W. Walters, the folklore about flying Africans is "collective mythology" produced by the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Walters 1997, 4). Walter analyzes a large corpus of African American literature from the point of view of utilizing this myth. For her, its uses must be recognized as counter-discursive historiography fitting into "a larger project of pan-ethnic, anti-racist literary studies" (Walters 1997, 25).



turns around the trans-Atlantic movement, the direction is back to Africa. Cliff's novels present two versions of this myth. One of them occurs in *Abeng*, and the other one in *Free Enterprise*:

Before the slaves came to Jamaica, the old women and men believed, before they had to eat salt during their sweated labor in the canefields, Africans could fly. They were the only people on this earth to whom God had given this power. Those who refused to become slaves and did not eat salt flew back to Africa; those who did these things, who were slaves and ate salt to replenish their sweat, had lost the power, because the salt made them heavy, weighted down. (A, 63-4.)

Some people believed that slaves punished to death came back as John Crow.<sup>194</sup> This could not have been true, for the skies of the island would have been black, not blue. But some people persisted, explaining the Crow-them eat the slave-them, and then the slave-them become the Crow-them and fly all the way back to Africa; is true-true. And then what? Nyam dead hyena for time ever-lasting?

Nuh, man, nuh tu'n back into warrior-them? And then the sweet sound of air hitting teeth. Disbelief. But longing for a return, to Africa, life, home. (FE, 119.)

In the latter quotation the rebelliousness of counter-myth is highlighted with the patois – it disturbs the pedagogical usages of the dominant language both as a story and as a discourse. The legend of flying Africans is often considered a mythic truth. It is a symbol of resistance and becoming free, but it has also been regarded as a euphemism for suicide (see Reyes 2002, 41-45). The myth is still carried on in various versions in the oral heritage of diasporic cultures of African origins. The presence of the myth of flying Africans is evidence that Cliff's counter-discourse not only revises the Western myths, it also documents and includes the African versions.

There is a large corpus of mythical stories in the communities of people of African descent throughout the Americas which link freedom, death, and return to one another. In numerous novels and studies about slavery, death among people kept as slaves is considered both as liberation and return to Africa. As Kadiatu Kanneh explains, "return to Africa presents itself as the release of death rather than as the hope of a liberated future" (Kanneh, 1998, 70-1). I would like to argue, however, that the myth of return emerges in a different light in Cliff's fiction. The return signifies a process of constructing identity through several kinds of rereadings of rebellious memories, myths, oral heritage, and matrilineal tradition, but also, through re-definitions of gender and sexuality. The return is a return to an imaginary home built on gendered and hybrid articulations of diasporic Caribbean culture. In Cliff's novels, the return home can also be concrete as it is in the case of Clare and Kitty. Suicide is only a possible mode of liberation only for Clover Hooper, who is neither African, nor a slave, but one of the few white upper-class characters of the novels.

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<sup>194</sup> John Crow (*Cathartes aura*), or the Turkey Vulture, is common also in many Jamaican proverbs (Senior 2003, 258). According to Olive Senior's *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, John Crow is regarded as an omen of death in Jamaica and many of the proverbs refer to death. In West African cultures, which later migrated also to West Indies, the vulture was perceived as a messenger of gods, and the sacred functions of the bird have still been preserved among the Maroons of Surinam. Senior emphasizes that "the generalized feeling that the vulture is sacred has been carried over among West Indian blacks, who will refrain from killing or molesting it" (Senior 2003, 258).

Ewart Skinner and Nicole Waller claim that “the flying African has become the writing Creole of *Wide Sargasso Sea*” while “the placelessness at stake is no longer that of the black captive in the Americas, but that of the *gens inconnus*<sup>195</sup> in between Africans and Europeans” (Skinner & Waller 1998, 105). Both the myth of return and the myth of belonging are part of Cliff’s literary constitutions of postcolonial consciousness. As Skinner and Waller claim, for Cliff “the proof of self in postcolonial imagination is intimately tied to proof of belonging” (106). They call Cliff’s work “the quest of belonging” which is carried in “the calabash formed by oral history and myth” (Skinner & Waller 1998, 106). However, I would like to argue that the quest of belonging in Cliff’s fiction is not a mere return to origins. Her narratives are deeply involved in re-forming “the calabash” in such a way that it has room for many kinds of marginalized people and for hybrid versions.

Even though the myth of return in Cliff’s novels is connected to resistance and finding an alternative tradition, death is still present in her narrative returns. In *Free Enterprise* Annie does not return to the Caribbean but the return is symbolically represented through her namesake who had twelve sons, and whose body drifted out to the Caribbean in a barge.<sup>196</sup> According to Skinner and Waller, the mythical Annie represents the quest for belonging in *Free Enterprise* (Skinner & Waller 1998, 106). The protagonist Annie and the mythical Annie are juxtaposed in the novel. Therefore it can be argued that Cliff’s narration re-iterates Afro-Caribbean mythology. The protagonist Annie does not have twelve sons but loves Rachel de Souza. Her character subversively re-cites the myth of return: while the actual return does not happen in the novel, the narrative potential for recitability and subversion remains. As the protagonist Annie participates in John Brown’s rebellion and commits herself to his fight, she embodies the counter-mythos typical of Cliff’s narration. Her re-written myth of Annie Christmas, I suggest, does not highlight myths of authenticity and origins in terms of place, but rather in terms of transnational resistance.

Another re-written “myth of return” can be found in *No Telephone to Heaven*. When the members of the guerrilla group to which Clare and Harry/Harriet belong end up in a fight with a racist film crew, it is revealed that somebody in the group has been a traitor. They are both shot to death in a Jamaican forest as they lay side by side in the bush. At the very moment of her death, Clare hears the sounds of jungle, the birds and the trees:

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195 *Gens Inconnu* (the unknown people) is the name of first chapter of *Free Enterprise* in which the narrator introduces Annie and her middle class Caribbean Creole background. The term in the novel refers to Creole people with internalized colonial ideals, but it has many connotations within Caribbean culture. The derived terms *Jonkonnu*, *Jankunu*, or *John Canoe* refer to a carnivalesque street masquerade, believed to be of West African origin, which occurs in many towns across the Caribbean just after Christmas.

196 Skinner and Waller interpret the mythical Annie Christmas as a reference to the widely known myth of Gang Gang Sara. According to this myth, Gang Gang Sara flew to the island of Tobago in order to search her family, which was taken from Africa. In Tobago, she marries Tom whom she had known already in Africa. When Tom died after many years, Sara wanted to fly back to Africa. She climbed a great silk cotton tree and tried to fly, not knowing that she had lost the art of flying as a result of having eaten salt. To this day the names of Tom and Sara can be seen inscribed upon the head stones of their graves where they have lain side by side for close to two hundred years. (For the full story see Skinner and Waller 1998, 99.) Sara’s story is vividly alive in Tobago and her grave is a local tourist attraction. It is said that witches gather there under the full moon.

She remembered the language.  
Then it was gone.

cutacoo, cutacoo, cutacoo  
coo, cu, cu, coo  
coo, cu, cu, coo  
piju, pijju, pijju  
cuk, cuk, cuk  
tuc-tuc-tuc-tuc-tuc  
eee-kah, eee-kah, eee-kah  
krrr  
krrr  
krrr-re-ek  
cawak, cawak, cawak  
hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo  
be be be be be be be be be be be be be be be  
kut ktu ktu kut ktu ktu  
cwa cwa cwa cwaah cwaah cwaah

Day broke. (NTH, 208.)

In the very scene, the language, or the authority of language, is broken and visibility is turned into audibility. In the moment of her death, Clare “returns home” in a way as she is left lying in a Jamaican bitterbush. Clare’s union with the land signifies the end of her identity process in death: her final connections to both, the Jamaican ancestral home and resistance, occur only as she is freed from all language. Paradoxically, however, it could be interpreted that the ending in *No Telephone to Heaven* recycles and confirms the clichéd connection between the nature and the female body. Yet, it is Harry/Harriet’s body besides Clare’s which makes the connection more complicated. Harriet’s femininity is not tied to the physical body – Harry’s transformation, first into Harriet and then into Jamaican soil, is more performative and problematic. Finally, the fighting bodies of Clare and Harry/Harriet deconstruct the masculinity of guerrilla representations. Resistance is no longer the privilege of men, as it is still in *Guerrillas* (1973) by V.S. Naipaul.<sup>197</sup>

197 My interpretation about the death scene is significantly different from Paula Morgan’s (Morgan 2003). She does not see any possibilities of subversion, finding homes, or return in the scene. Morgan considers it in terms of an inter-textual relationship to Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her interpretation of the ending alludes to Antoinette’s suicide illustrating hopelessness, impossibility of resistance, and martyrdom. She writes that “Cliff’s romanticization of the guerilla commune testifies to her identity as a product of the 1960s and 1970s – decades characterized by student protest in what was largely a metropolitan movement but elements which filtered into the West Indian archipelago” (Morgan 2003, 167). In this context, she refers to Cliff’s “youthful idealism” with terms such as Hippiedom, Jesus freaks, neo-pastoralism, kibbutz, and Flower Power (167). Morgan is trying to explain the author’s identity by founding on Clare’s destiny and to label her work as naive romanticization rising from student protest. Indeed, Morgan considers *Sargasso Sea*’s ending more subversive than that of *No Telephone to Heaven*. According to her “Rhys’s ghost is free to wander in an infinite seeking, an infinite knowing of homecoming without home” while Clare’s body remains statically “among the graves” (Morgan 2003, 168). Obviously, I do not share Morgan’s views. From the poststructuralist point of view, the death scene deconstructs the structures of the dominant language while referring to subversion and semiotic reiteration. Like Patricia Krus and Belinda Edmondson, I argue for a feminist-semiotic reading. According to Krus, Cliff recovers, through the figure of the Maroon, “the monstrous black woman and turns her once again into a powerful trope” (Krus 2002, 47). Edmondson pays attention to the linguistic subversion of the novel and states that “before the material revolution can be actualized, there must be a revolution of words” (Edmondson 1999, 136).

At the moment of her death, the sounds of birds are point of Clare's last conscious awareness after having lost language. In her study *Mythmaking and Metaphor in Black Women's Fiction* (1991), Jacqueline de Weever examines the metaphors of animal transformation, birds and flying in the fiction by women authors of color. According to her, they often symbolize a fundamental change in a person's life (see de Weever 1991, 61-93). In Cliff's fiction, magic, myth, death, and Caribbean nature, including its flora and fauna, are connected to her counter-narratives. In all three novels included in this study, the themes of nature and birds are connected to Nanny of the Maroons. According to Lemuel A. Johnson, Nanny is the character who "remains indivisibly present in the intricate weave of *Abeng's* genealogies and disconnections within which she is always represented as person-in-reality and re-presents as spirit of the deep crevices of the Blue Mountains."<sup>198</sup> Nanny, as a signifier of the subversive feminist tradition, becomes a symbol encapsulating the ethos of Cliff's re-written history. I agree with Noraida Agosto who claims that "Nanny returns to life and merges with nature by imprinting her presence in streams and trees, by being re-incarnated in birds" (Agosto 1999, 51). Nanny becomes a re-written Sycorax, a symbol whose significance is repeatedly expanded. Even in *Free Enterprise* her spirit keeps rebelling as the narrator tells us that "if a white man crosses Nanny's grave, he dies instantly" (FE, 29). The narrator carries on by describing the sources of the Hope River as follows:

The most important tributary of the Hope River was the mammee, the Akan word for mother. [...] The source of the healing stream [the Hope River] and the Mammee was in the Blue Mountains, near the site of Nanny Town. [...] The source is to be found in the cascade of water which washes the mountains, *near where a flock of white birds, the souls of Nanny and her soldiers, gather each evening at dusk. Near where the faces of Nanny and her soldiers are imprinted in the trunks of lingnum vitae.* (FE, 53 emphasis added.)

Hence, in *Free Enterprise* it is Mary Ellen who, like Nanny, is truly a mother warrior capable of avenging from beyond the grave. Annie tells the readers that Mary Ellen was a "dedicated fighter in the Cause, Mother of Freedom, Warrior and Entrepreneur, who some believed came back from the dead in nineteen and six to avenge her good name" (FE, 203). By embodying the birds and nature in the end of *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare, too, is symbolically transformed into one of Nanny's soldiers.

Along with birds and bird transformations, the figure of the snake also functions as a counter-myth in Cliff's novels. Her snake-stories belong to the corpus of reparative myths challenging the Christian mythology of evil serpents. As de Weever explains, the snake is a symbol of the life force, healing and re-creation in many cultures since it is capable of self-renewal in sloughing off its skin (see de Weever 1991, 72-5). In Greek mythology, for example, the serpent is connected to Hera, Athena, and Asklepios thus gaining attributes related to

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<sup>198</sup> Johnson 1991, 124. Although Johnson speaks here only about *Abeng*, his statement is also applicable to Cliff's other novels.

healing and re-juvenation. In Cliff's fiction, the snake seems to symbolize the colonized nation and its oppressed people. The snake represents the strength and the ability to resist – although it might easily get trampled by the oppressor. In the beginning of *Free Enterprise*, Annie remembers her dream in which a beautiful Rainbow Serpent is trampled in a park by fancy ladies walking with parasols. In the dream, Annie is challenged to remember, which means that she must find a connection to the lost tradition:

Last night she'd had a strange dream, about a multicolored snake with black head. A man in the dream – she couldn't quite make him out – talked about how the snake was being trampled; she, who'd always feared snakes, was in the dream frightened for one. Was she it?

The snake was being trampled, by people casually strolling through a garden, and the snake was attempting to get away, the man said, by shedding his skin until he'd run out of skin. [...] Then he (the man) asked: "Have you forgotten about Dan? Have you lost consciousness of the Rainbow Serpent? Damballah? Aido Hwedo? Who wrapped his body around the Earth to create a globe?" (FE, 20-1.)<sup>199</sup>

The snake also gains Afrocentric characteristics in *No Telephone to Heaven's* version of the Medusa story. According to Greek mythology, the beautiful Libyan queen Medusa angered Athena by sleeping with Poseidon in her temple. Athena turned Medusa's beautiful face into an awful mask and her hair into snakes. In the end Medusa moved to a distant kingdom which soon turned into a desert because everything she touched or everybody who looked at her turned into stone. Clare remembers being called Medusa by Boy as her hair curled:

Clare thought of her father. Forever after her to train her hair. His visions of orderly pageboy. Coming home from work with something called Tame. She refused it; he called her Medusa. Do you intend to turn men to stone, daughter? She held her curls, which turned kinks in the damp of London. Beloved racial characteristics. (NTH, 116.)

Medusa changes white ideals of beauty into "beloved racial characteristics" which re-contextualizes Clare's heritage. It is Boy's white mythology which tries to tame the features of Medusa. According to de Weever, Medusa is a common symbol of Africanness in women's literature of color. The quest of the protagonist is often to accept "the Medusa part of herself" in order to blaze a trail from static or paralyzed identity into an active subjectivity.<sup>200</sup> Medusa is the figure of a "magnifying mirror" as Maria Helena Lima points out by quoting Susan Bowers: it functions to "reflect and focus Western thought as it relates to women, including how women think

199 Damballah and Aido Hwedo belong to the Dahomey pantheon of Gods. Aido Hwedo, the rainbow serpent, is sometimes regarded as Aida Hwedo, the wife of Damballah. They are both strong loas in Haitian vodun. It is sometimes believed that Aido Hwedo keeps the globe together by being wrapped around it, and the earthquakes are caused by his movements.

200 For more of Medusa, see de Weever 1991, 76-80. It is interesting to note how de Weever analyzes the character of Velma in *The Salt Eaters* by Toni Cade Bambara. The protagonist of the novel, Velma, has descended into catatonic state. She begins to heal only after she accepts the Medusa parts of herself, and as she understands that the serpents in her hallucinations are healing symbols representing her realization that she can claim and direct her own life.

about themselves” (qtd. by Lima 1993, 38). Like Lima, I argue that the figure of Medusa means for Clare the disclosure of her “internalization of sexual and racial oppression” (Lima 1993, 38). The petrifying Medusa and Queen Elizabeth II are the opposite symbols for Nanny in Cliff’s narration. As a culturally hybrid character Clare, however, needs them both.

The snake is a powerful, colonial counter-myth particularly in *Abeng*. The narrator explains how much the British were afraid of snakes, an indigenous part of Jamaican fauna. In fact, they were so afraid that they brought a mongoose, a natural enemy of the Cobras, from India to destroy all the poisonous snakes. The battle between the mongoose and a snake, described at length by the narrator, becomes a metaphor of Jamaican colonization. Finally, the mongoose wears out the snake’s resistance, and the snake is eaten. Of other animals, only the wild pig knows how to protect itself from the mongoose’s hunting rituals. Nonetheless, the mongoose outwits the pig too – it sneaks into the pig’s nest and eats its piglets. The wiliness of the mongoose reaches everywhere and it quickly destroys the original fauna of the island. The narrator, emblematically, uses the name Massa Mongoose, a prefix often used by plantation owners, to describe the foreign animal. Moreover, the snake is called “the bushmaster” combining derogatory term “bushman” with “master”.

Persistence and speed – these kept the attack of the mongoose going until his approaches and retreats stunned the heavy, by-now weary bushmaster. At the sign of the snake’s acquiescence – a slowing of reflex reflected in glassed-over eyes – the mongoose struck once more, faster and more deftly than before, not retreating this time, but seizing the snake’s head in his jaws and cracking the skull between his teeth. [---].

The mongoose in Jamaica multiplied rapidly after all the snakes were dead, and then he began to kill the chickens, and the birds, and the wild pigs. (A, 113.)

One by one she [the wild pig] delivered her babies, and one by one the mongoose seized them and ate them. When the pig had finished and was looking to fasten her babies to her teats and eat the placenta which had followed on their birth, she found no babies, no placenta, nothing at all – and the mongoose had long since disappeared back into the underbush. People said you could hear the bellows of her loss sound through the mountains of the countryside – that was how they could tell that Massa Mongoose was close by, and they took precautions against him [---]. (A, 114.)

The story about Wild Pig, Massa Mongoose, and Bushmaster becomes a hybrid animal story re-signifying colonial mythology. In addition, it must be noted that the story is gendered. The mongoose is referred to as “he” while the wild pig is referred to as “she”. It is characteristic of Cliff’s narration that Caribbean nature, as well as the Afro-Caribbean heritage, and the tropologies of resistance, are gendered. The narration juxtaposes the gendered perspectives with colonizer/colonized -dichotomies suggesting an alternative way of structuring Jamaican reality.

To conclude, I would like point out that different kinds of reversed “neomyths” and counter stories expressed in literature also unsettle and re-shape the collectively shared cultural boundaries. As Elizabeth Baeten explains, a human being is in some respect self-created,

and it is our duty “to discover and create the best myths for organizing our public and private lives” (Baeten 1996, 20; see also 189). Mythmaking creates a horizon for the cultural processes and self-identifications, structuring the social environment and negotiating collective values.<sup>201</sup> Postcolonial myths deconstruct the power of the mythical pedagogical in order to reconceptualize the foundational cultural processes. In Cliff’s narration, they constitute the creolized and syncretic “imaginary tradition” within which the diasporic, de-colonized identities are contextualized. Many kinds of myths connected to leaving, returning, revising, escaping, transforming, moving, and flying are emblematic to Cliff’s novels. Her creolized myths construct a symbolic dimension for localized cultural practises beyond colonial binaries, the other scene. Thus, I suggest that the hybrid mythology in Cliff’s novels is used as a tool for cultural re-placement, a way through which her characters are able to locate their cultural selves. The counter-imagination, however, is not a gender-neutral concept in Cliff’s text. In the following chapter I aim to examine how it is gendered, even queered.

#### 4.2. Victorian Values Revisited: Gardens of Resistance in *No Telephone to Heaven*

The tradition of the mythical women emerges as a resource for resistance in the novels of Michelle Cliff. While the guerrilla heroes are turned into warrior heroines and the keepers of Afro-Caribbean rituals and traditions, they are also more often than not queered characters. These feminist and sexualized versions of myths unsettle the “order of things” structured by white mythologies. In this chapter, I will consider Cliff’s feminist mythologies as tools for deconstructing colonial normatives, patriarchal imageries, and the axiomatic nature of heterosexuality. Moreover, I will examine the presence of Edenic garden myths in Cliff’s writings. The myth of an Edenic garden and its subversions are typical of Caribbean literature where they react against the colonial garden imageries of the islands as sites of moralistic Christian pastorals. Cliff’s overgrown Eden is no longer Adam’s paradise but a site for female wisdom.

Cliff’s narration claims recognition for the feminist tradition both thematically and textually. For example, the narrators are often referring to female deities of the West African pantheon of gods retrieving them into history, while the narration itself is filled with intertextual references to Caribbean women’s writings. I agree with Lemuel A. Johnson who argues that Cliff’s women are active agents in history. For Johnson, they are “Subjects-in-History”, not frozen in “an ahistorical essentialism” but remaining dynamic in relation to history, like Nanny of the Maroons (Johnson 1990, 124). Mythical, reparative consciousness is mediated to daugh-

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201 Baeten draws on Ernst Cassirer’s theorizations. For Cassirer myth gives a symbolic structure to “the unmediated organic give and take” and allows “the inception of truly human, or cultural, life” (Baeten 1996, 6). Myth is a symbolic formation organizing human experience, which according to Cassirer’s argument, is “analogous but not equivalent to language, art, and science” (Baeten 1996, 6). Cliff’s polemic usages of this mythical organization are, no doubt, an important part of her textual rebellion.



ter figures in female collectives. Kitty, for example, knows the secrets of Jamaican nature as a matrilineal tradition:

Kitty knew the uses of Madame Fate, a weed that could kill and that could cure. She knew about Sleep-and-Wake. Marjo Bitter. Dumb cane. Ramgoat-dash-along. [---]. She knew that if the bark of the tree came in contact with sweating pores, a human being would die quickly. *She taught her daughter* about Tung-Tung, Fallback, Lemongrass. About Dead-man-get-up. Man peyaba and Woman peyaba. [---]. *As a girl she had studied with the old women around* and they had taught her songs like the one the funeral procession had sung. (A, 53 emphasis added.)

Thus, mythmaking in Cliff's fiction becomes a female-centred process which includes women's actions hidden beneath the surface of the male heroism: John Brown's raid is funded by Mary Ellen, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens' War Memorial is based on Clover's pictures.<sup>202</sup>

Even though a number of studies have been published on Cliff's feminist mythology only a few of them analyze its lesbian or queer characteristics. It is not only her textual process of hybridization that revises legitimized mythologies, but also the process of queering them. Carole Boyce Davies analyzes Audre Lorde's writings in a way which, I think, is applicable to Cliff's fiction. Davies writes that "for Lorde, the politics of her lesbianism is seen on a continuum between her female ancestors and the women who sustained her" (Davies 1990, 68). The very female-identified continuum is also present in Cliff's novels. All the female characters that have committed themselves to resistance could be read as lesbians,<sup>203</sup> although queerness in her novels is not limited to female characters. Captain Parsons, who smuggles runaway slaves, is a homosexual. Powell, the teacher who decides to abandon colonial teaching manuals is also probably as well. In *Free Enterprise*, Captain Parsons names himself as Romeo at the time when he is interrogated by white soldiers after his love scene with a male Carib. Thus, the archetypal Western star-crossed lover is turned into a black-skinned gay freedom-fighter (FE, 113-4).

Queered identities in Cliff's novels are not constituted in the margins of the communal cultural tradition. In her writings, feminist mythologies and queered identities become a crucial part of the collective postcolonial Caribbean identity process. Yvonne M. Klein analyzes the kinds of lesbian novels which do not, unlike many lesbian texts, envision the subversion of patriarchal power structures, but "reach back to reinvent a mythic history of female power out of the shards and scraps of their childhood and their culture" (Klein 1990, 331). Klein argues, that for many female authors she regards as lesbians (Barbara Demming, Audre Lorde, Jeanette Winterson, Jovette Marchessault), "the writing of the text becomes an act which affirms self in community with others" (Klein 1990, 331). Cliff's novels, *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* in particular, are texts of such lesbian affirmation. Klein refers to "revisionist mythmaking", a term she borrows from Alicia Ostriker, in examining reconstituted myths of lesbian novels which

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202 See more for the feminist myth-making in Cliff's fiction e.g. Edlmair, 1999, 37-9 & 46-7, Johnson 1990, 125, and MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 159.

203 Here I am drawing on Barbara Smith's, Adrienne Rich's, and Audre Lorde's definitions of lesbian identifications. I will return to the issues of lesbian identifications in Cliff's novel in Chapter Six.



retrieve “images of what women have collectively and historically suffered” (Klein 1990, 334). Cliff’s counter-discourse becomes a strategy for revisionist mythmaking in its aims to queer the Caribbean past rather than to create separate lesbian histories. At the same time her queered *mythos* subverts, or abrogates, the naturalizing power of white hetero-mythology. Characters such as Mesopotamia, the leader of the Jamaican rebellious female slaves Parsons meets in prison in *Free Enterprise*, Nanny of the Maroons, or Mma Alli, the lesbian obeah-healer at Judge’s plantation in *Abeng*, are all part of Cliff’s mythical lineage of lesbian/feminist resistance. Mma Alli, for example, is described by the narrator as a “one breasted warrior woman” representing “a tradition which was older than the one which had enslaved them” (A, 34). Her rebelliousness is symbolized by her use of an abeng which she always kept oiled (A, 36). Mma Alli’s use of the abeng juxtaposes her character with Nanny of the Maroons. Mma Alli “had never lain with a man” (A, 35) but is a communal healer to whom “the women came with their troubles, and the men with their pain” (A, 34). In Cliff’s fiction the queer, “un/appropriated” characters are carriers of the traditional African knowledge and become the sources of strength for the most oppressed people, particularly in *Abeng*.

Consequently, nuclear families do not occupy Cliff’s imaginary island – no strong fathers, angelic mothers, or dutiful children appear in her novels. While Cliff’s counter-myths rewrite both Western/colonial and heteronormative/patriarchal imageries, they also dismantle the Christian–moralistic norms regulating the Victorian family. I agree with Kathleen J. Renk, who has analyzed Cliff’s narration as deconstruction of family values in colonialist discourse. Her narration displaces the family as an “ideal social institution in order to overturn the legacies of colonialism” (Renk 1999, 9). Renk sets aside Cliff from the writers of the post-independence period who, according to her, echoed the rhetoric of colonial nationalism in order to establish new identities based on strict categorizations. Moreover, for Renk the family has been a mythological “metashrine” of Western culture conserving the normative stereotypes of gender and sexual norms. (See Renk 1999, 7-8.) Drawing on creolized, queered, and feminist sources Cliff challenges Victorian family values. Indeed, there are no functional families in her novels, and neither Clare, Harry/Harriet, Annie, nor Mary Ellen have a family of their own. The relationships they have support them in their cause, and they are not based on family ties but on other types of bonds. The only family depicted in the novels is the Savage family, which appears to be both dysfunctional and abusive.

Cliff’s Jamaica is no longer an Edenic island cherishing the Victorian mythical, yet hetero-patriarchal legacy, which according to Kathleen J. Renk was associated with the “enclosed garden, a place of serenity overseen by the queen” (Renk 1999, 8). In the Caribbean colonial context the Edenic myths and metaphors are not uncommon. The Imperialist discourse often refers to the Caribbean as paradise islands. Jamaica Kincaid, for example, plays with these metaphors by naming one of her protagonists Lucy after Lucifer whom God expelled from paradise, whereas George Lamming, for one, juxtaposes colonized peoples and fallen angels in his autobiographical novel *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953). The fallen angels have no entry to

the garden, whether biblical or English. For Renk, the colonial myths concerning biblical/English gardens assume that the Caribbean is a shadow paradise arranged by the “natural law” of the King or God (Renk 1999, 122). Cliff’s Jamaica might be a home but not always a beautiful one. Her narration does not hide the social problems of Jamaica, including violence, unemployment, drugs, and extreme poverty:

There was a new government. One party. And shortages - severe. Petrol at ten dollars a gallon - like salt, on the rise. And the dollar falling fast. People said the IMF might repossess the country. It was a time of more hideaways for the rich - the expansion of the sandbox. “Make it your own,” the tourist board told the visitors. Tires burned again at roadblocks. And tourists tipped demonstrators who let them pass, easing their escape. No sugar - much of the time. Little rice. No flour. (NTH, 187.)

Cliff turns the myth of the colonial paradise upside down in *No Telephone to Heaven* by displaying the shadows of Eden. One of these shadows is homophobia. Unlike many other Caribbeans, Cliff discloses how vulnerable homosexuals are to violence of most brutal kind (NTH, 171; A, 63).<sup>204</sup> Jamaica does not fit the frames shaped by expedition mythologies – it is not a fertile garden with a white man as a severe but just gardener.<sup>205</sup> As M. Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga note, *Abeng* starts with an idyllic depiction of the height of the Jamaican mango season: “It was a Sunday morning at the height of the mango season. [...] There was a splendid profusion of fruit” (A, 3). However, this Edenic scene is immediately interrupted by the reminder that “in 1958 Jamaica had two rulers: a white queen and a white governor” (A, 5).<sup>206</sup> Cliff’s narration does not allow a one-dimensional view of Jamaica.

Jamaica is no more Edenic than it is a Paradise. Therefore I suggest that one of the most focal counter-myths in Cliff’s novels is the deconstructed Edenic garden. The first chapter of *No Telephone to Heaven*, depicting the life of guerrillas at Miss Mattie’s old farm, is called “Ruinatē”. Clare’s resistance culminates in her grandmother’s old house, which used to be surrounded by a garden. By the time Clare moves there with Harry/Harriet and the other guerrilla members, the place has become totally wild. The garden, which Miss Mattie used to tend like an English orchard, has overgrown, been ‘ruinated’. In one of her essays, Cliff explains that the noun ruination “contains the word ruin, and nation. A landscape in ruination means one in which the

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204 The unraveling of Edenic/colonialist expedition mythology is an ongoing process throughout Cliff’s literary works. Adrienne Rich, for example, mentions *Abeng* in her essay “Resisting Amnesia” (1983). For Rich, *Abeng* is a novel which is “not romantic or nostalgic about the past” but has a “consciously critical stance toward both white and male culture, and a respect for the courage and spiritual power of Black women which is far from sentimental” (Rich 1987, 149). As the narrator of *Abeng* describes the rural Jamaican people sitting in a church service, she remarks: “The people in the Tabernacle did not know that their ancestors had been paid to inform on one another: given their freedom for becoming the blackshots of the white man. The blackshot troops were the most skilled at searching out and destroying the rebels – but they also had a high desertion rate and had been know to turn against their white commanders in battle (A, 20). Indeed, I agree with Wendy W. Walters who claims that “the fantasy of a precolonial Eden is not allowed to remain intact in the postcolonial milieu” (Walters 1998, 226).

205 This kind of scene is a typical frame of criticism in Caribbean feminist writing. Especially, Elizabeth Nunez’s *Prospero’s Daughter* is based on the idea of the white man as a gardener of an island, claiming it to be like Prospero in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

206 For an analysis this scene see Booker and Juraga 2001, 116.

imposed nation is overcome by the naturalness of ruin. As individuals in this landscape, we, the colonized, are also subject to ruination, to the self reverting to the wildness of the forest" (Cliff 2003, 157). In the novel, the Guerrillas start to clear the land, and as they swing their machetes in unison they sing songs "they remembered from the grandmothers and grandfathers who had swung their blades once in the canefields" (NTH, 10). The wild garden becomes a metaphor for strength, re-claiming, and resistance in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Moreover, the clearing of the grandmother's house and the land from the bush is paralleled with Clare's (re)covering selfhood.<sup>207</sup> The narrator describes Miss Mattie's estate, not as an Edenic garden, but in terms of wildness and resistance. As Ian Strachan notes, the "wildness" in Cliff's novels takes on a maroon quality: the wildness becomes "the mythic inspiration for resistance" while opposing its colonial demonization (Strachan 2002, 249). The wildness of the Jamaican flora and fauna subverts the pastoral ideal of a tamed garden. This is important, because the garden metaphor consistently re-appears in Caribbean women's writing. For example, in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), the rotting garden plays a crucial role in the queer identity process of her characters.

The myths concerning Edenic gardens are related to typical versions of colonial myths, namely the myths concerning the colonized land as an Arcadia. According to Bill Ashcroft, Arcadia-myths can be divided into two types: either the colony is Arcadian, a Utopian place of freedom and possibility, out of which "the new race might develop", or it is Dystopian, the colony is considered a wasteland, on the edge of the world (Ashcroft 2009, 89). Cliff's narratives present another kind of Arcadia. It is England, which is juxtaposed with Arcadia: her English Arcadia is cold and dark. The chapter in *No Telephone to Heaven*, which describes Clare's sad and depressing life in London, is called "Et in Arcadia Ego" (Here I am in Arcadia), referring to Virgil's fifth eclogue where the Death enters Arcadia. I partly agree with Strachan and Giselle Anatol who explain this title in terms of discovering the falseness of imperial myths (see Strachan 2002, 250<sup>208</sup>). However, from a queer point of view yet another intertext must be acknowledged. In one of the most famous novels describing homosexual love, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) by Evelyn Waugh, the first part is called "Et in Arcadia Ego". This section of Waugh's novel depicts the two male protagonists falling madly in love with one another. Like Clare, they study classics in an English university and feel distanced from their families. This intertext opens up a possibility to interpret Clare's sense of loneliness and depression also as yearning for a lesbian partnership. England is not a mythical promised land for Clare, and therefore she must find her "ruinated I-land" (Cliff 2003, 157) of Jamaica.

207 See Davies 1994, 113-129. For Davies the representation of a house as a source of self-definition is typical of Caribbean women's writing. I agree with Davies who argues that "the house and its specific rooms become metaphors of self and loci of self-identification" in many novels by Caribbean women (Davies 1994, 126). The house of self-identification has become wild, part of the bush. As Wendy V. Walters notes, "for Cliff, *ruinate*, *bush*, and *wildness* are equivalent terms to which she opposes the terms *civilization*, *colonialism*, and *cartography*" (Walters 1998, 222). Walters considers Clare's clearing the house as a re-mapping her Jamaica.

208 Here Strachan is elaborating Anatol's original arguments.

It is the wildness of the forest outside the mythic Edens and Arcadias which is turned into a counter-myth by Cliff. The wildness ruins the organization of the English garden and revises its values – whether hetero-patriarchal or racial. The god in the wild paradise is no longer a Christian one but the African Sasabonsam. The narrator describes how Sasabonsam governs the work of the guerrillas on Miss Mattie's estate: "There was no forgiveness in this disorder. Sasabonsam, fire-eyed forest monster, dangled his legs from the height of a silk-cotton tree" (NTH, 9). This Eden-gone-wild becomes the new home for Clare's queer-guerrilla family and emerges as a site for her unconventional love for Harry/Harriet.

The re-written paradise of Cliff's novels also greets other mythical visitors, such as the black Christ figure. *No Telephone to Heaven*, also includes the Eurocentric myth about Jesus as a narrative that can be subverted, but from a different angle than the character of Annie Christmas cited above. The narrator re-considers the old question asking why Jesus would be a blue-eyed and white-skinned male. Poor, orphaned Christopher, a son who has "no past and no future" (NTH, 47) from the Kingston shanties is named the black Christ in *No Telephone to Heaven*. In a Kingston ghetto-church, a preacher, whose name is Josephus, calls Christopher "Christ" and tells him that his name means "Christ-bearer" (NTH, 37), Christophorus. Josephus, however, sees his name in other contexts too: it does not only remind him of Christ and Christopher Columbus who brought Christ to the New World, but also of Henri Christoph, an ex-slave and a Haitian revolutionary. For Josephus, little Christopher becomes at the same time a revolutionary and a Christ figure who "smash de craven image in de white-man church" (NTH, 38). The preacher explains to the unconvinced congregants:

"T'ink of dis bwai name' Christopher. Tu'n to de side, bwai." Christopher did as he was told. "See him back? See how him resemble Lickle Jesus? Dis is my body which is broken for you." [---]. "Him nuh favor Lickle Jesus? His is true bredda of Lickle Jesus. Him have Christ in him heart. Him is Christlike. Christ like him. Mek we pray. (NTH, 39.)

Christopher's character appears as a hybrid representation that combines and subverts not only colonialist and anticolonialist discourses, but also revises, like Annie, the most powerful myth of Western culture.

Christopher's character has been widely debated in Cliff-scholarship. I agree with Patricia Krus who argues that Christopher constitutes an anti-thesis to the New African Adam of the Négritude-movement (Krus 2002). The African Adam represents a symbolic new beginning after a volcanic eruption in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* by Aimé Césaire. Krus observes that in *No Telephone to Heaven* Christopher, who is repeatedly paralleled with the Yoruba god of iron and fire Ogún, is not himself familiar with the Yoruba tradition (Krus 2002, 39). In the beginning of Chapter Nine, describing Christopher's future years as "De Watchman", the narrator quotes a Yoruba hymn and asks "Had the young man Christopher known this hymn. Had he received the faith it represented?" (NTH, 39). I concur with Krus that for Cliff "the backward glance towards Africa advocated by the Négritude movement is no longer a possible alternative"

(Krus 2002, 40). Unlike the 1930s and -40s Négritude-writings emphasizing Afro-centric nostalgia, Cliff's counter-mythology is about more contemporary creolized hybridity. For Judith Raiskin, Christopher represents Josephus' resistance to internalized colonialism which has made "Blacks accept for their own savior an image of the European conqueror" (Raiskin 1996, 200). Paradoxically, Christ-Christopher later becomes an unemployed drifter, outcast and, a murderer "De Watchman". Research on *No Telephone to Heaven* has analyzed his character as an abject other<sup>209</sup>, but his double role both as a savior and as an avenger has not been widely discussed. At the end of the novel, Christopher is hired as an actor by an American film group for the role of Sasabonsam, the above-mentioned Yoruba god:

He had no past. He had no future. He was phosphorus. Light-bearing. He was light igniting the air around him. The source of all danger. He was the carrier of fire. He was the black light that rises from bone ash. The firelight passed through his feet and hands, and his blade quivered with his ignited fury. (NTH, 47.)

Christopher becomes a counter-mythical savior, a light-bearing avenger.

I would like to conclude this section by arguing that Cliff's feminist and hybrid counter-mythos expands and complicates the stereotypical colonizing discourse about the Caribbean. It alters intersecting sexual, gendered, and racial norms while encountering the Victorian moral family norms. The colonialist imageries of the Caribbean as an Edenic paradise or a Dystopian wasteland are encountered with more complex representations including the feminist and the queered ones. It is the re-written "Eden-gone-wild" which emerges as a powerful metaphor of resistance in *No Telephone to Heaven*. On the one hand, the revisionist myth-making of Cliff's novels highlights the creolized tradition providing more polyphonic grounds for Caribbean subaltern identity process. On the other hand, their feminist ethos offers a site for identification for diasporic women. I suggest that Cliff's revised mytho-poetic vision constructs a new textual home, a postcolonial "third space" for healing the colonized female body.

#### 4.3. Social Rituality, Gender and the Textual Healing of a Colonized Female Body in *Abeng*

According to Louis Althusser, and his feminist followers such as Judith Butler, the ritual materializes social structure.<sup>210</sup> Ideological dimensions of society, like subject formation, receive their material status through ritual. Rituality, Althusser claims, is a means of governing social practise, but also, it is a carrier of the ideology of the state apparatus (Althusser 1984). As I have stated earlier, the colonial practises were manifested in several rituals in the Caribbean. Moreover,

209 See e.g. Sethuraman 1997; Cartelli 1995, Agosto 1999. Agosto claims that Christopher's character illustrates the way in which "poverty and misery can erode memory and destroy identity" (Agosto 1999, 40). While I agree with Agosto, I also think that Christopher's figure might be read as a dual symbol, like the abeng-conch.

210 See Althusser 1984, and Butler 2000. Butler, for example, considered the constitution of gender in the 1990s as "ritualized public performance" (Butler 1990, 277 n. 9).

the resistant consciousness also emerges, materializes, and preserves itself in rituality. In this chapter, I will analyse Caribbean rituality in Cliff's novels. I suggest that, as form of resistance, it deconstructs the colonizing ideological rituality, which regulates the agency of colonized subjects. However, her revised rituality also creates decolonizing counter-narratives, including those of the African Caribbean heritage, for the purposes of "textually healing" the colonized body. Furthermore, I propose that Cliff's re-written rites are not only feminist, but also sexualized practises of bodily emancipation.

According to Althusser's theory of interpellation, the ideological state apparatus hails the subject in interpellation. A subject mobilizes his/herself by answering this hail, by recognizing the social interpellation, and by participating in the rituality manifesting the ideology (see Althusser 1984, 126-32). Similarly, the colonial state apparatus hails the "othered" subjects as subaltern, "inappropriate", and colonized. In *No Telephone to Heaven* the narrator demonstrates how the supremacist discourse leans on the logic of binary thinking by further categorizing the female body of color as diseased and abnormal. The logic becomes particularly visible in an aforementioned passage I discussed above, in which Boy tries to enrol young Clare into a "classy" high school and the lady principal calls Clare "white chocolate" (NTH, 99). Clare becomes interpellated as an abject, unwanted. She is neither white, nor colored enough. She gets caught, to apply Francoïse Lionnet's terminology, in "the myth of authenticity" which relies on seemingly "authentic" binaries (see Lionnet 1992b, 32). Clare starts to identify herself as an "albino gorilla" (NTH, 91) and develops a self-loathing unable to claim her intersectional and hybrid identifications. Similarly in *Free Enterprise* Annie uses liquid blackener in order to better fit into John Brown's movement, to shed her Creole background (FE, 9-10).<sup>211</sup> It is the process of ritual healing which is needed to negotiate a place for the "in-betweens" in Cliff's novels.

Of course, rituality can be considered in more religious terms. Rituality carries the foundational belief systems of each society. As the Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko explains, "the ritual acting out of myth implies the defence of the world order; by ritually imitating sacred exemplars, the world is prevented from being brought to chaos" (qtd. in Murray 2000, 188). Thus, a rite preserves and keeps alive the heritage of a certain community. In acting out the mythical foundation, the ritual "remembers" the collective traditions resisting the "historical amnesia", to use Adrienne Rich's words (Rich 1987, 145). Therefore, it is no wonder that the depictions of rituals play such a pivotal role in postcolonial literature – and this is particularly true of Caribbean women's writing. Rich, for example, presents Cliff's *Abeng* as a novel which resists the historical and cultural amnesia of Black women and feminist history in particular (Rich 1987, 149). Literary representations of rituals often symbolize decolonizing interpellations: rites

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211 According to Kim Robinson-Walcott the question about the authenticity of light-skinned people remains current in Jamaica. She notes that many light-skinned Jamaicans feel bitter because they are labeled as "not true Jamaicans" (Robinson-Walcott 2003, 93-4). Literary history also wrestles with this same question. It has been argued that white Creoles cannot meaningfully identify with the spiritual world of "this side of the Sargasso Sea" (Robinson-Walcott 2003, 94). See for more on contemporary white West Indian writers and about their negotiations of race Robinson-Walcott 2003, *passim*.

preserve something dispersed by the colonial order and offer a possibility of re-enacting the subaltern tradition. By performing the rite, the participant gains agency also within this decolonizing, or indigenous order, as is the case in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*. Thus, the depictions of rituals the protagonist undergoes are often the essential moments in the process of her identity constitution in postcolonial literature.

Names embody the power of language. Thus, naming and name-calling have been traditional and very concrete rites of colonial power to interpellate colonized subjects as subaltern. The right to name a being or a place implies ownership and domination over the subject who is interpellated. The practise goes back to the pre-abolition period when the plantation owners took the liberty of naming their slaves with colonial, Christian, or even mocking names. As Bill Ashcroft encapsulates, naming is central to the process of colonization, as re-given names "are called into the service of the language's reconstitution of the alien cultural reality" (Ashcroft 2009, 133).<sup>212</sup> A named being becomes a spoken subaltern instead of a speaking subject. However, in postcolonial literature acts of colonialist naming have been countered and altered in many ways. Naming becomes rituality which resists the colonial interpellation. For example, according to Gay Wilentz, people in African diaspora resisted the naming practise by giving secret names not known by the oppressor to their children. Wilentz highlights that the power of the name is so strong in many African cultures that people often concealed their true name so that an enemy could not use it for harming intent (Wilentz 1992, 90).<sup>213</sup> Thus, the names in oral African cultures illustrate the embodying nature of language: they substantiate the objects or persons they name, as Ashcroft claims (Ashcroft 2009, 132).<sup>214</sup> The new or secret name, the act of self-naming, relates to the agency of the subaltern. Naming, according to Wilentz, is "a method of regaining the control of one's life" (Wilentz 1992, 174) while it connects the individual to her native community.

In Cliff's novels, naming, whether that be the receiving or giving names, emerges as a ritual which is connected to the process of constituting a decolonized agency. Mary Ellen is given a secret name in *Free Enterprise*. Her mother, a native Caribbean gun smith, takes her to the Maroon colony for a ceremonial naming:

Quasheba chose for her daughter an unobtrusive name, for public use, and an obtrusive, secret one, which went with Mary Ellen Pleasant to her grave. [---].

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212 Postcolonial literary scholars have widely analyzed not only the renaming of individuals but also places. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin pinpoint, the renaming of spaces and places is a "symbolic and literal act of mastery and control", the colonized lands become "written over" as the names and languages of the indigenes are replaced by new names" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002, 32).

213 A name can be an object of black magic in the syncretic religions of Caribbean origins. According to Barry Chevannes, a name is considered a part of the personality of its carrier, who can thus be harmed by the magic directed at his or her name. Chevannes highlights that particularly girls in Jamaica are given nicknames which are used publicly while the real name remains a secret (Chevannes 1995b, 36).

214 The problem of naming therefore also opens up a horizon for a larger philosophical discussion about the relationship between language and the material world. According to Ashcroft, in the oral cultures "the individual is the name" as "language is not separated from the 'objective' world" (Ashcroft 2009, 133).



The Maroon settlement was concealed in a forest above the Housatonic, overlooking the Appalachian Trail. *There the people held a nine-night ceremony for the baby, in which her obtrusive, secret name was spoken, in which she received her soul.* In turn Quasheba thanked them, then spoke to them of the alchemical source of gunpowder, reciting the treatise of the Ethiopian magus, Trismegistus, by heart, as Ogun<sup>215</sup> had taught her, lit by the moonlight of the New England night. [---]. While she spoke, the people passed her newborn daughter hand to hand. (FE, 130, emphasis added.)

The ritual above unites the Afrocentric tradition with the resistant consciousness represented by the Maroons. Through the ritual Mary Ellen also becomes interpellated by the resistant tradition and gains agency to enable her to begin her struggle. The struggle is symbolized by her secret, obtrusive name. Later, she iterates this ceremony for Annie by naming her Annie Christmas, instead of Regina, in order to initiate her into John Brown's conspiracy. Annie is no longer named after a colonial queen, but a mythical female warrior. The importance of naming is not only particular to *Free Enterprise*. The narrator reveals to the reader in *Abeng* that Clare, too, has a secret name. "Officially" Clare has been named after the college Boy's grandfather attended at Cambridge University (A, 141), although Kitty secretly names her after a peasant girl Clary. Clary was "not quite right in the head" (A, 138), but a warm-hearted girl who bravely helped Kitty when they were young. It is female solidarity which is secretly praised beyond the Western educational institution. When Harry finally names herself as Harriet in *No Telephone to Heaven*, the gender binary becomes deconstructed. I would like suggest that the acts of naming are crucial rites in Cliff's novels, if we consider rituality in Althusserian terms, as sites of interpellation hailing the subjects in each social order.<sup>216</sup>

Renu Juneja has called the rite "an *alternative mode of mimesis* for minorities" (Juneja 1996, 59). For her, the rite is a ceremony within which culturally significant events and experiences are made timeless: the past is brought to the present (Juneja 1996, 59). As an alternative mimetic form the rite has an ability to change the conventional representation concerning, for instance, subaltern femininity. As Farah Griffin notes, white and patriarchal ideals have convinced many black women that their bodies are ugly, abnormal or unwanted. Griffin argues that black feminist writing has taken the challenge to deconstruct these internalized ideals: while they document pain and abuse they often simultaneously create sites of pleasure, healing and resistance. She refers to this kind of a literary project as "textual healing". Literary means of textual healing include the uses of alternative imageries, depictions of rituals, and written variations of local oral tradition (Griffin 1996, 521).<sup>217</sup> It revises the historical idea of the black female body as victimized by re-imagining the body outside the oppressive stereotypes. Therefore such

215 In the novel, Ogun is a master who teaches Quasheba to become a gun smith. Ogun, however, also belongs to the Yoruba pantheon of gods. He is considered a powerful Orisha presiding over war, fire, hunting and forging metal. Through the reference to Ogun, this scene highlights the spiritual power of African Gods in providing the means of resistance to the Maroons.

216 For a discussion of the ritual act of naming as a site of healing see Valovirta 2010, 130-1. For Valovirta the act of naming, particularly in the context of Edwidge Danticat, becomes an empowering act of individual liberation.

217 Griffin uses *Abeng* as her primary example of textual healing, but I think that her discussion also applies to *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Free Enterprise*.



textuality is a liberating, feminist political action. In Cliff's novels these textual actions are often depictions of rituals and other kinds of counter-myths. I argue that as political actions they focus on blurring the binaries dominating gender-, sexual-, and racial paradigms, as evidenced by the example of white chocolate cited above. Cliff's decolonizing rituality subverts the hegemonic binaries by means of textual healing.

Sara Ahmed has paid attention to the cultural formation of bodies through the "ritualisation of certain forms of touch" (Ahmed 2000, 91). For her, the body becomes recognized in social encounters which also define threatening bodies as abject. Ahmed observes that the production of strange bodies as objects is "determined through the 'border': strange bodies threaten to traverse the border that establishes the 'clean body' of the privileged subject" (Ahmed 2000, 93). It is Clare's body which emerges as a threat violating the 'border'. In Cliff's novels it is the ritualized textual healing which aims to 'un-abjectify' the strange body of the 'in-between'. In her narration the female body of color is re-signified both as beautiful and sensual. Moreover, it is not the male gaze which defines the female body of color but rather, it is healed through connections, whether sexual or not, with other women. The relationships between Clare and Zoe, Clare and Harry/Harriet, Annie and Mary Ellen, or Annie and Rachel emphasize the female-centred nature of bodily healing in Cliff's narration. The white mythology of the patriarchal family is displaced as a goal for an un-abjectified female body. Cliff's revisionist textual healing is turned into a queer praxis. As Mma Alli, a lesbian obeah-healer<sup>218</sup>, ritually heals the body of a pregnant and sexually abused slave girl, Inez, at Judge's plantation, her goal is neither to prepare Inez for maternity nor to restore the heterosexual companionship:

When Inez came to Mma Alli to get rid of the mixed-up baby she carried, Mma Alli kept her in her cabin overnight. She brewed a tea of roots and leaves, said a Pawpaw chant over it, and when it was beginning to take effect and Inez was being rocked by the contradictions of her womb, Mma Alli began to gently stroke her with fingers dipped on coconut oil and pull on her nipples with her mouth, and the thick liquid which had been the mixed-up baby came forth easily and Inez felt little pain. [...] Her [Mma Alli's] tongue [was] all over Inez's body – night after night – until the judge returned from his trip to London and Inez had to return to the great house. *But she went there with new-found power.* (A, 35 emphasis added.)

It is notable that Cliff's representations of intimate healing between women are not only queered rituals but also Afrocentric ones. Resistance to the colonial tradition is connected to female-identified intimacy which re-imagines the decolonized Caribbean woman beyond heteronormativity.

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<sup>218</sup> In his study of several pre-colonial African healing traditions and spiritual ceremonies, Cary Alan Johnson refers to the role of homosexual people as practitioners of these rituals (Johnson 2001). According to Johnson, even today in Nigeria there are references to spiritual nature of homosexuality (Johnson 2001, 138-40). As the healer characters in Cliff's novels are all homosexual or queer figures, it would be easy to interpret that it is a trace of Afrocentricity in her works. I, on the contrary, tend to turn towards more poststructural reading of her queered healers. I suggest that Cliff's queer healers become sites of subversive iterations of Afrocentricism rather than cultural essentialism. For more on queered healer characters in Caribbean literature see Ilmonen 2008.

Mma Alli's ritual abortion reminds one of the rites of spiritual cleansing and ceremonial bathing, which are commonly used metaphors in Caribbean women's writing. They symbolize the physical and spiritual renewal of the colonized and abject subjectivity. The representations of renewal rituals provide a discursive site of healing for historically and culturally marginalized women. Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, for example, depicts many kinds of ritual cleansings as sites of Avey's healing. After Avey becomes physically "purged", she is able to re-claim not only her new-found femininity but also her diasporic roots.<sup>219</sup> For Clare, the rite of bathing becomes a site for acknowledging her 'in-between' body without the boundaries it has been restricted by. As Clare bathes with Zoe in a forest pond, they are no longer divided by racial and class lines but able to connect with each other intimately:

This was the first time Clare had been naked with someone besides her little sister. Another girl. Another female. In the baths in this same place with Kitty each had been clothed. Zoe's naked body was lean and muscled. Her hips were narrow and her thighs long. The patch of tight curly hair between her legs glistened in the riverwater and the sun. Clare's own body was also long. The gold of her legs and arms met the brown of Zoe as the water cascaded between them, creating a shield which served their modesty (A, 120).

I would like to suggest that the ritual healing in *Abeng* 'un-abjectifies' unwanted, inappropriate female bodies. Moreover, its textual healing moves beyond the mere decolonial sites of corporeality and becomes a complicated assemblage of queer-practises challenging the norms of gender and sexuality.<sup>220</sup>

In the poststructural feminist debates of the 1990s gender, *par excellence*, was considered constructed through iterated forms of social rituality. Judith Butler, for one, applied Victor Turner's studies of ritual social drama in gender constitution and stated that social actions, such as gender, required performative repetition. For her, this repetition was "at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (Butler 1990, 277). *Abeng*, depicting Clare on the threshold of puberty, examines the social *Bildung* of a colonized girl entangled in the net of gendering, racializing, or sexualizing social rituals. One very concrete example of such rituals is the ceremonial killing of a hog in *Abeng*.<sup>221</sup> According to the narrator the hog-killing is an important masculine ritual which excludes women:

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219 For Caribbean rituality connected to regeneration by Marshall's works see Billingslea-Brown 1999, 49-55.

220 For further analysis on sexual healings in the context of Caribbean women's writing see Valovirta 2010, 123-166. Valovirta applies theories of feminist affective reading to Danticat, Mootoo, Brodber, and Adisa.

221 The representations of ritual hog-killing are not uncommon in African American literature. Alma Jean Billingslea-Brown calls the hog-killing as "the rite of (masculine) communion" or "the rite of confraternity" (Billingslea-Brown 1999, 106) which it also seems to be in *Abeng*. For further analysis of hog-killing in *Abeng*, see Booker and Juraga 2001, 120. See for hog-killing also McRuer 1997, 91.

The hog-killing was a big occasion, an important social occasion, almost as festive as a wedding or a christening, or a Kingston garden party. And, as the men gathered in the backyard, smoking cigars made from jack-ass rope, and sipping from pints of Appleton estate, their women and wives and daughters and sisters gathered to visit with Miss Mattie, to drink tea or soft drinks [---]. (A, 58.)

Moreover, the narrator enlightens the reader about the historical importance of hog-killing in the Maroon communities:

There had been thousands and thousand of wild pigs, until the planters began to shoot them, and Maroons stalked them for food. *The Maroons turned the hunting of the wild pig into a ritual*, searching for animal only at certain times of the year and arming themselves with nothing than machetes and spears. *It was a man's ritual* – the women took part when the pig was brought back to the settlement. (A, 112, emphasis added.)

Clare is frustrated to tears when her boy cousins, Ben and Joshua, do not allow her to join them as they ceremonially roast hog genitals on fire. They turn her away just stating that “Dis sint’ing no fe gal dem” (A, 57). The narrator explains that “she had heard this before – spoken in different ways” (A, 57), and describes how Clare could not control her disappointment, frustration and rage as she rushes back home whereas the boys “only turn back to their feast with a slight shrug, almost in unison” (A, 58). Social rites construct the masculine positions which regulate the feminine ones. As the narrator further explains: “They were able to hurt her because they were allowed to do so much she was not – she was supposed to be here, in this house with all the dressed-up women” (A, 61). Clare, however, tries to rebel. She sneaks the gun out of Miss Mattie’s house, ignoring Zoe’s objections, intending to hunt down Massa Cudjoe, the famous wild hog in the area. Her goal is to obtain the masculine position and thus arouse Zoe’s attention – but fails.

Clare’s hunting-trip has a tragic end as she accidentally shoots Miss Mattie’s bull. The girl does not understand why her parents and her grandmother react to the event so strongly. It is the omniscient narrator who explains that Clare has stepped over her limits by being “a girl who seemed to think she was a boy. Or white” (A, 134). The shooting takes place after Clare has bathed with Zoe in the forest pond and understands that she is in love with her girlfriend. Clare violates the social boundaries of gender, race, class, and sexuality by falling in love with a poor, peasant, black girl. Obviously, the violation of social norms does not go unpunished. She is sent away from her family to live with an upper-class, racist, white widower Mrs. Beatrice who is supposed to teach her to be a “proper woman”, to disconnect her from “vulgar” habits.

In Mrs. Beatrice’s house Clare has her first period. This is an extremely symbolic episode in the novel, not only because Clare is thinking about Zoe at the moment of menstruation. Just before, she has discussed with Mrs. Beatrice’s sister, Mrs. Stevens, about Jamaican history. As Meryl Schwartz notes Clare’s political awakening is tied to her sexual awakening, and she first menstruates “at the time she first acquires some knowledge about Jamaica’s history” (Schwartz 1993, 602). As the symbolic menstruation takes place at the very end of the novel, I agree with Caroline Rody who argues that *Abeng* rebels against the tradition of a Bildungsroman by

ending the story with menstruation. Rody explains that “a female Bildungsroman that ends with menstruation rather than a romance or marriage suggests that the telos of this woman’s life will be her developing communication with her own body” (Rody 2001, 179). Many feminist scholars, such as Julia Kristeva, have acknowledged that menstrual blood is associated with the abject and unwanted (see Browdy de Hernandez 1998, 247). Menstrual blood is a taboo not to be referred to in public. Particularly in Jamaica, many kinds of rites, magic and beliefs are connected to menstruation. It is an absolute taboo. According to Elisa J. Sobo, these taboos are ways to control woman’s “unnatural” body and “unruly sexuality” by legitimating the shame related to menstruation (Sobo 1997, 145). As Clare’s first period is more welcomed than unwanted and abject, it highlights the gendered identity process. The period symbolizes both, the feminist and the lesbian initiation of Clare’s Bildung. The masculine ritual is countered by the female one, and Clare understands that she does not need to be a boy in order to love Zoe. She is on the brink of a healing interpellation. In this context, the ending of *Abeng* becomes a radical feminist literary act turning the menstruation from tabooed sickness into a form of political consciousness.<sup>222</sup>

To sum up, rituality echoes the system of morals, values, and traditions of a particular society. A rite substantiates a certain myth, history, or tradition. In a literary analysis the depictions of rituals are particularly fascinating as they provide a mimetic form for systems which are mimetic themselves. The representations of rituality in indigenous literatures often highlight the process of symbolic initiation into one’s own ethnic tradition. A person living in-between two cultures reflects his or her identity in terms of two coinciding discursive systems, for example the patriarchal colonial Anglo-American one and the patriarchal colonized Afro-Caribbean one. On the one hand, it is institutionalized rituality which interpellates an in-between subject as a colonized or racialized agent. On the other, rituality can also function as a site of decolonizing consciousness for the subject, as she or he might find an alternative form of rituality a way to get initiated into the indigenous system of cultural values as well. I would like to suggest that, in Cliff’s fiction, rituality indeed provides an alternative mode of mimesis for Caribbean women. In *Abeng* the gendered sexualized rituality is highlighted. My use of the concept of rituality in the contexts of Cliff’s novels is thus two-fold: First it materializes the foundational mythos of a certain culture illustrating the iterated nature of cultural norms, such as the hog-killing. Second, it functions as a site of rebellious initiation in the subaltern subject constitution, as in Mma Alli’s healing. I will now turn to a further analysis of the forms of rituality in Cliff’s novels – particularly those connected to healing story-telling.

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222 For more on taboo connected to menstruation in Jamaica see Sobo 1997 passim. For more on rituals and beliefs connected to menstruation in more general terms see Rich 1986, 103-6. According to Rich, menstruation taboos are often tied with gynophobia and mystification of women or motherhood. *Abeng*’s radical ending with menstruation is not a singular case in Caribbean women’s writing. For example, Jamaica Kincaid connects the theme of the first period to feminist Bildung-process in *Annie John* (1985). See for menstruation in *Annie John* e.g. Alexander 2001, 67.

#### 4.4. Sickness Encountered by Healing Storytelling in *Free Enterprise*

Oral history, stories, folklore, and ritual storytelling all play a pivotal role in Cliff's novels, yet this is not exceptional in postcolonial literatures. In general, these devices often appear there as a means of rewriting 'the master's past'. Many literary scholars who have analyzed ethnic minority literatures have considered the author as a kind of story-teller taking the place of a traditional oral story-teller.<sup>223</sup> Kathleen Ashley, for example, has stated that a postcolonial author transforms collective folklore in a dynamic process into a new kind of literature which can be called "literary folklore" (Ashley 2004, 272). Indeed, Trinh T. Minh-ha has emphasized that storytelling has been regarded as the oldest form of constituting a historical consciousness, (qtd. in Renk 1999, 15). Therefore, my aim in this subchapter is to map the unique ways Cliff's narration uses orality. I argue that in Cliff's novels storytelling, representing a collective tradition and local memories, has an enormous healing power for an individual who knows, learns and remembers the stories. Moreover, I suggest that the oral heritage transcribed into her novels often refers to the recognition of matrilineal histories and women's rebellious efforts. In Cliff's novels a character's ability to re-connect with her own colonized tradition seems to symbolize the survival of self, identity and a sense of belonging.

Storytelling can also be considered a ritual act through which the past is reconstructed. As the stories are ritually performed and iterated they preserve and reproduce the cultural heritage and identities related to it. As Alma Jean Billingslea-Brown underlines, "a tale is linked to the ritual, which embodies an essential quality of continuity" (Billingslea-Brown 1999, 79). Thus the literary folklore has gained an extremely important role in postcolonial Caribbean literatures. In Cliff's words, it "retraces the African past of ourselves, reclaiming as our own, and as our subject, a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the cane fields, or gone to bush, or trapped in a class system notable for its rigidity" (LLB, 14). I agree with Marjorie Pryse who has considered black women writers as "conjurers" since the folkloric sub-narratives utilized in their novels conjure up a new (decolonizing) vision of the past (Pryse 1985, 2). As an author Cliff conjures up a queer feminist vision of the Caribbean past to be discovered by her characters while processing their identities.

In *Free Enterprise*, it is the oral stories of the grandparents and the cultural ancestors whom the lepers in Carville conjure up. Annie, too, needs the stories of Carville in order to build her imaginary home in diaspora. The multicultural community of patients *speaks themselves into being* in the novel highlighting its quality as an oral novel, or the kind of speaking literature mentioned above. Ritual storytelling is practised in Carville as the patients share their histories with each other. A Hawaiian male patient imparts the story of his people in a testimonial form in the voice of his ancestor who was on the shores of the island when Captain Cook arrived.

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223 See e.g. Pryse 1985, Gates 1988, Ashley 2004, Ahokas 2008.

As he takes the role of a storyteller he transforms into “an eye-witnessing I” re-telling the past beyond a colonizing version of written history:

He [the Hawai’ian leper] descended from feathered kings, so he said, and carried with him a long thigh bone as an amulet, on which was scrimshawed the last moments of Captain Cook, the work of the Hawai’ian’s great-grandfather, a gift to his great-grandson, who in turn is telling the tale of the scrimshaw to some of his fellow lepers, in his great-grandfather’s words [---]:

”At first I liked James Cook. He seemed like a fair man, a technician rather than an ideologue – at first. No aristocrat, he had been a farmboy in England, and then realized he had a gift for navigation [---].”

”We were eager for his departure. Too many liberties taken, for one thing. We could sense what was coming. We wanted to avoid bloodshed, which bloodshed was becoming inevitable with our growing realization that these Englishmen did not simply wish to visit us, to ‘discover’ us, as they put it. They wanted to own us, and the islands, tame the landscape to their purposes, tame even the slopes of Kilauea. Now what would Pele have done about that? [---].”

The great-grandfather’s voice was silent. The great-grandson spoke now in his own words. (FE, 45-8.)

Ritually, he conjures up history displacing Cook as a hero. Finally, Annie too raises her voice and sings her story out loud, not as Kitty does as Mrs. Black but as her own self:

Her head held back in song, haloed in white. Her cinnamon skin shone in the sunlight. One slender arm gestured as her voice took on the twang of her native land. Her song was by way of introduction to her story [---]. (FE, 51-2.)

As deCaires Narain argues, Annie’s voice positions the reader as a listener (deCaires Narain 1998, 264). The act of ritual storytelling challenges the pedagogical, documented archives and becomes a site of locating the fragmented<sup>224</sup> self.

The storytelling in Carville illustrates the process of memory-telling in Cliff’s novels. The individual memory stratifies the unitary version of official history and multiplies the representations it provides. I agree with Noraida Agosto who states that the novels “propose historicizing memory as a means to empower the oppressed” (Agosto 1999, 2). I suggest that the deconstruction of the “official memory” has three functions in the novels. First, it provides historical knowledge which has been silenced and forgotten – “scattered as potash in the cane fields”. Secondly, it provides sites for rebellious identity processes by re-discovering the resistant cultural heritage of indigenous peoples, such as Nanny of the Maroons. Thirdly, the memory-telling constitutes a structure of de-colonizing sub-texts thereby altering the Western novel form. The acts of memory-telling, such as the Hawai’ian man carries out, politicize the official memory by concentrating on the noisy margins of history. Noise is usually defined with terms such as ‘unwanted’ or ‘disturbing’ and in this case the oral history appears as an

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224 I agree with Erica Johnson who has remarked that Cliff refers to leprocy as a disintegrative disease and uses it as “a literal expression of the book’s underlying theme of the disintegrating subject” (Johnson 2009, 127). The cultural fragmentation of a diasporic subject is metaphorized with lepers in Carville.

unwanted, abject version. The storytelling emerges as ‘counter-memory’ referring to a way of remembering and interpreting the past from oppositional or alternative points of view.<sup>225</sup> In Carville’s leper colony, it literally becomes a site for healing. As noises from the margins highlight the orality and spoken elements of colonized history, whilst rebelling against conventional literary forms by providing ‘speakerly texts’, as mentioned earlier in the context of patois-transcriptions. Cliff is leery about written documents and official archives, books are “fragile things” (FE, 211).

I propose that Cliff’s “noisy” textuality prevents the indigenous, “oral archives” from disappearing. If history represents the ideas of the people who wrote it, the ideas of Others appear as the noise of history. Noise, a disturbing sound, unsettles the master’s versions and precludes them from appearing as transparent and axiomatic. Rites, counter-myths, indigenous memories and story-telling disturb and fragment the Western linear and teleological narratives, whether historical or fictional, by a multiplicity of voices. Cliff’s fiction supplements history with feminist versions and unwanted stories, as the narrator in *Free Enterprise* concludes: “And when the smoke cleared the name officially attached to the deed [Raid at the Harper’s Ferry] was John Brown. Who has ever heard of Annie Christmas, Mary Shadd Carey, Mary Ellen Pleasant?” (FE, 16). The polyphonic stories of these women illustrate “the historiography of adjacencies”, to quote Erica Johnson, describing Cliff’s ethos of historical polyphony (see Johnson 2009, 126).

Cliff’s polyphonic and “noisy” textuality deconstructs the idea of “the unified self” by highlighting the manifold identity-scripts diasporic subjects must process. Johnson emphasizes that Cliff’s “coalition of dissenting voices therefore depicts epistemological [...] resistance to hegemonic historical narratives that elide her subjects” while her characters draw on “erased past events as sources of knowledge” (Johnson 2009, 119). Cliff’s politics of solidarity between coalitional voices becomes crystallized in the Carville-stories but also in the symbolics of Nanny and the Maroons, which evolve to signify a transnational solidarity and the shared sense of oppositionality in *Free Enterprise*. Rachel de Souza, who, as noted earlier, is a Marrano Jew, shares her experiences in a settlement called Ultima Thule, populated by several kinds of outlawed peoples in Carville. Rachel describes the people in Ultima Thule (paradoxically, An Ultimate Border), as follows:

You could say these people were ‘in the silence’. I don’t think folks realize just how many settlements like this there were. Mostly in caves and swamps, both of which this country has in abundance. Unknown but known. I don’t think any official records were kept. Maybe there were songs or something. Africans mixed with Indians, Cherokee and Creek and all kinds, half-breeds, quarter-breeds, whatever. [...]. They called themselves Maroons (FE, 63).

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225 The term ‘counter-memory’ has drawn to postcolonial field of scholarship from the fields of studies engaged with extensive collective traumas such as slavery or the Holocaust. The term is also often used in connection with postcolonial autobiographies. Originally, however, the term derives from Michel Foucault’s philosophy of history. For Foucault, counter-memory threatens the official memory and its traditions (See more for Foucault’s understanding of counter-memory e.g. Hutton 1993, 5-6). Thus, the concept of counter-memory politicizes and historicizes legitimate (official) ways of remembering, or representing the past.



There is no lack of people in the Ultima Thule, but their voices and histories must be collected in order to gather a transnational history of solidarity in oppression. I argue that Cliff's ethos of historical re-writing is reminiscent of what Chandra Talpade Mohanty has called "comparative feminist studies" or the "feminist solidarity model" providing a way to "theorize complex, relational understanding of experience, location and history such that feminist cross-cultural work moves through the specific context to construct a real notion of universal and of democratization rather than colonization" (Mohanty 2003, 238). Comparative solidarity, I think, emerges as a site of healing in *Free Enterprise*.

Terry DeHay has studied the memory narratives of Third World women writers. For her, the classical realist novel provides a "metalanguage" which is ideologically informed, and the ideology of which "is that of the patriarchal culture of Western Europe and later the United States" (DeHay 1994, 28). DeHay argues that multiethnic women's literature narrates memory in order to deconstruct the traditional metalanguage by providing "openings for other narratives, other versions of history" and leads to a revisioning or 're-membling' (DeHay 1994, 28). Cliff's memory-telling, the narrative strategy of adjacencies, unravels the metalanguage of the colonial novel form. While *Abeng* is dominated by a strong, rebellious narrator remembering for Clare, and for Jamaican people in general, *No Telephone to Heaven* consists of disintegrated fragments of Clare's own memories as she stands in the truck with the guerrillas.<sup>226</sup> However, the deconstructive qualities of story- and memory telling seem to be at their most powerful in *Free Enterprise* as it contains an intricate net of transnational remembering voices (or noises). While the stories of historical characters such as those of Mary Ellen Pleasant, Mary Shadd Carey and Marian Adams, are remembered anew, the choir of remembering voices is ritually healing itself by speaking – like the people in Carville.<sup>227</sup>

226 The novel as a literary genre has been often associated with rise of the nation state. I agree with both Ramchandran Sethuraman and Maureen Moynagh who read *No Telephone to Heaven* as a successful subversion of the novel form in narrating the trans- or postnational ethos. For Sethuraman *No Telephone to Heaven* subverts "the false claim to consistency and univocal meaning of the novel" (1997, 252) and for Moynagh the "ethical coding" of the novel traces the "'political unconscious' of the postnational" (Moynagh 1999, 115). I do, however, think that the discussion of Cliff's postnational ethos should also be expanded into Cliff's other novels.

227 In studying women's postcolonial autobiographical narratives, Angelita Reyes notes that "the autobiographical 'I' may also be the autobiographical 'we'" meaning that the individual memory telling includes the configuring of identity in terms of the collective past (see Reyes 2002, 31). Even though Cliff's novels are not unequivocally autobiographical, they follow this kind of auto/ethnographical pattern where collective and individual memories are braided together in order to heal, not only the personal self but also the cultural self. This is why, for example, the patients in Carville, may assume the voice of their ancestors.



Storytelling in Carville also opens up other postcolonial themes. It becomes a site of healing rituality which resists the Western understanding of healing as a medical technology.<sup>228</sup> In Cliff's novels, the more holistic healing includes the re-interpretation of one's history, her cultural heritage, and the matrilineal tradition. It is no coincidence that when Clare, sick after the miscarriage returns to Jamaica in *No Telephone to Heaven*, she needs to get involved in a socially meaningful process in order to be healed. During her re-settling process, Clare starts to teach alternative Caribbean history to local school children and joins the guerrillas. I argue that in Cliff's novels, health and sanity are not as much a matter of rational science as they are based on a cultural sense of the self. Clare becomes healed only after she re-locates her cultural home and defines herself as a Jamaican woman. Respectively, in Caribbean feminist storytelling, it is also the author who becomes a healer as she imagines healing stories for a diasporic community. As Gay Wilentz emphasizes in her influential study *Healing Narrative: Women Writers Curing Cultural Dis-ease* (2000), an author, who draws from her cultural story-telling traditions, also becomes a collective healer for her people. As a feminist scholar Wilentz acknowledges that women's storytelling and knowledge of "the secrets of life and death" counter "the patriarchal structures of modern medicine" (Wilentz 2000, 12). Wilentz uses the term 'dis-ease' in order to describe the traumatic sense of history of minority groups (Wilentz 2000, 3).<sup>229</sup> It is the de-colonizing "herstory", drawing on myth and cultural heritage, which becomes a site of healing in Cliff's narration.

Many studies of African American literature have addressed the tradition of racism in the history of Western medicine (see e.g. Lee 1996, Gilman 1985 & 1986) drawing on nineteenth century "scientific" categorizations of race. As Lee points out, it was the light/white skin which signified health, hygiene, and rationality while blackness or color referred to sickness, dirt, and magic (Lee 1996; 67, 53-74). It is through fiction that the author/storyteller/healer gains the possibility to examine the social constitution of cultural dis-ease and of producing healing counter-stories. I would like to argue that the Carville sections in *Free Enterprise* explore the

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228 Karen McCarthy-Brown has paid attention to the problems of Western medical sciences and their ways of concerning the human body as a passive "physical machine", while the healing of this machine is based on mastering special discourses and possessing degrees, instruments, medications, and white coats. She regards Western medicine potentially as a capitalist enterprise within which the "right to heal" is considered a matter of proprietary right. (See McCarthy-Brown 1997, 123-4). This view differs radically from the healing Caribbean women's writing often envisions. In their representations, an individual healing is often connected to the symbolic, collective healing from the colonial traumas. Moreover, an individual sickness frequently symbolizes one's sense of cultural displacement and historical disconnectedness. This is the case e.g. in *Unburnable* by Marie Elena John, *Breath, Eyes, and Memory* by Edwidge Danticat, or *Praisesong for the Widow* by Paule Marshall. This kind of "healing art" opposes the rationality of Medical Sciences descending from Enlightenment thought. While the "medical machine" was based on a patriarchal rational, it was the female body which needed to be controlled and medicated in the name of national advancement. For more on gendered analysis of healing see Wilentz 2000, 1-15, and for more on the patriarchal nature of medical sciences see Rich 1986, chapter VII passim.

229 In Caribbean women's writing the dis-eased sense of dislocation, homelessness, marginalization, and the loss of one's sense of the self has often been metaphorized as madness. I agree with Evelyn O'Callaghan who sees these depictions of Caribbean female madness as "ontological insecurity" arising from an inability to fill up the demands of patriarchal and colonial power structures (O'Callaghan 1990, 92). To the novels describing this kind of madness see e.g. Jean Rhys: *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Zee Edgell: *Beka Lamb* (1982), Erna Brodber: *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), Marie Elena John: *Unburnable*.

theme of racism in the medical institution: the projection of dirt and sickness on the colored body while dealing with the healing power of story-telling.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, Carville becomes a synecdoche for a colonized island or country in general. It is a place where the unwanted or abject bodies can be hidden “so as not to endanger the clean, as opposed to unclean, individual. Colonies were founded for this purpose” (FE, 38). Annie is also told that leprosy “flourished among the darker races” (FE, 40). In Carville, the lepers are deprived of their real names which are not even engraved in their gravestones. They are dispossessed of their personality as they are only allowed to use the numbers, like Holocaust victims, given them by the US Health Department. The stories of the lepers represent the ‘ghostwriting’ engaging with the gaps of history typical of Cliff’s narration (see Johnson 2009, 116). However, Annie identifies with the lepers and shares their storytelling. Carville becomes a transnational site of shared oppression.

The narrator of *Free Enterprise* provokes the reader by speculating how leprosy, or the Hansen’s disease, arrived to America. She radically disrupts the myth of discovering the New World:

What if a slave, from Jamaica, Cuba, Surinam, Brazil, Barbados, the Virgins, any of the Lesser or Greater Antilles, emerges from the water, a man in an iron mask, the scourge spreading to his extremities. He is belled around the neck. What if he finds a way to propel himself across the water; what if he sets out to discover America? What if he is armed with only with his disease? (FE, 36).

The myth of Colombus is once again subverted and appropriated while the “disease of the darker races” is turned into a weapon, a manner of resistance. Moreover, the narrator claims that there are stories of anarchist patients who terrorized the nearby cities:

Oral histories of lepers breaking out of the landscape, and into the City, terrorizing innocent people; lepers looting stores, leaving behind notes: “This is the hand of a leper”; lepers disrupting the auction block – mainstay of the city’s commerce – jumping onto the platform and kissing the auctioneer, appalling the paying customers. No wonder the authorities forced to enclose them. They threatened the common good. They were outrageous, anarchic. (FE, 45.)

Paradoxically, leprosy is turned into a weapon provided by racist prejudices.<sup>231</sup> The stories about patient-anarchy can be paralleled to the resistance of the colonized; they reflect the process of making oneself visible in the eyes of the others. The stories constitute a “history of oppositional consciousness” to quote Chela Sandoval’s term. In her *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), Sandoval envisions a coalitional politics for the oppressed in order to create a transnational

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230 The story-telling in Carville illustrates the Decameronian structure of *Free Enterprise*. This intertextual structure has been analyzed by Erica L. Johnson who points out that “in contrast to Boccaccio’s characters whose story-telling community gathers in a ‘safe’ space far from plague ridden Florence, Cliff’s storytellers find that they share a ‘contaminated space’” (Johnson 2009, 128). As Johnson remarks, the patients in Carville do “not contaminate another with disease but with knowledge” (Johnson 2009, 128). The Carville sections highlight the healing power of storytelling as well as its ability to forge new solidarities transnationally, rather than sickness and introverted communication present in *Decamerone*.

231 This is not a unique occurrence of the theme of leprosy in Caribbean women’s writing. For example Elizabeth Nunez-Harrell enlarges on the theme of racist prejudices and leprosy in her novel *Prospero’s Daughter*.

ideology of resistance. For Sandoval, it is neither the race, sexual orientation, gender, nor class which forms a ground of resistance but an oppositional consciousness, a shared experience of difference and subordination wherein oppositional activity takes place (Sandoval 2000, 54). Sandoval conceives the “weaving between and among oppositional ideologies” as a new topographical space within which the knowledge providing a “break with ideology” can be marshaled (Sandoval 2000; 57, 43). For Sandoval, it is this kind of differential coalitional consciousness shared by the oppressed which resists the ideological state apparatus theorized by Althusser (Sandoval 2000, 61-3). I argue that in the Carville-sections, as well as in the description of the Ultima Thule, Cliff’s narration reaches the oppositional coalitional consciousness and re-vision transnational resistance, as the narrator explains: “in the colony, new kinship was forged” (FE 43).

The oppositional consciousness in Cliff’s novels is shared through rites, rituals, and traditional storytelling which create a realm of re-membling the colonized past. Folklore, Caribbean heritage and feminist counter-myths become sites of fictional history resisting the oppressive archives. These local and rebellious histories re-locate the colonized subject into the past which has been “bleached from our minds” as Cliff articulates in *Land of Look Behind* (1985, 14). It is the de-colonized past which is a way to the post-colonial present and coalitional consciousness. Moreover, Cliff’s depictions of rites and ritual healing re-negotiate the abject or appropriated body beyond the oppressive social borders. Previously wounded, the subaltern female body becomes materialized without those social boundaries which have categorized her as unwanted. In Cliff’s fiction, the colonized Caribbean woman must take her journey towards healing by utilizing resistant memory. She needs to find her feminist self by recognizing her matrilineal heritage.



## 5. Mothers, Grandmothers, and the Matrilineal Counter-History

Stereotypical depictions of black motherhood often represent the mother of color in the roles of a helper, a caretaker, and a nurturer. This kind of 'Mammy' appears as a mystical guardian of secrets, a person who can solve many kinds of conflicts with a down-to-earth attitude and a demotic wisdom. Motherhood and mother-daughter-relationships play a pivotal role in Cliff's narratives. The themes of colonized motherhood, grandmothers, matrilineal traditions, and migrant daughters are represented in several ways. In this chapter, my aim is to analyze both (grand)mothers, and maternal traditions as part of Cliff's re-written history and decolonizing counter-discourse. On the one hand, I examine her mother-characters as the subjects who both experience and resist colonialism. On the other hand, I will consider the role of her fore- and grandmother -characters as the symbols in a feminist counter-history as well as being the catalysts of the daughter-protagonists' journey while processing their identities. Finally, I will also analyze Cliff's depictions of maternity from more unconventional perspectives by discussing the themes of homosexuality and the problems of the lost status of motherhood.

Therefore, I will argue that representations of motherhood in Cliff's fiction illustrate both the defining power of the colonialist discourse around the topic of maternity and her textual rebellion against it. The colonialist discourse affects mostly the mothers, while the grandmothers take on the roles of rebels. Thus, I will claim that the different functions of the maternal relations appear as generational in her novels: First, I will analyze the generation of colonized mothers, then the rebellious grandmothers and their rebellious qualities, and finally the daughters who need to re-define their own maternal heritage in order to acquire an anticolonial consciousness. Susheila Nasta posed a challenge to Caribbean women's writing in the 1990s. According to her, Caribbean women writers need to deconstruct the stereotypical myths of colonized mother-figures and to reconsider the identity problems between the Caribbean mothers and their daughters in order to "recreate and give birth to new forms and new languages of expression" for motherhood, while their challenge is to "demythologize the illu-

sion of the colonial motherland, Britain" (Nasta 1993, 214). The "new language of expression" becomes my analytical tool in this chapter. My aim is to examine how Cliff's novels re-write Caribbean mothers in ways that challenge the generic formulas of both masculine and Euro-centric literary traditions.<sup>232</sup>

Consequently, my hypothesis is that Cliff's representations of motherhood are contextual. They, for example, highlight the role of cultural and historical, even symbolic mother-figures. This differs from individualist, biological or psychoanalytical depictions of maternal relationships, which all, according to Patricia Hill Collins, are Western ways of conceptualizing motherhood (Collins 1991, 116). Collins conceptualizes black motherhood in more collective and cultural terms by displacing the biological 'blood-lines'. She highlights the role of 'othermothers' in communities of African diaspora, such as neighbors, aunts, grandmothers, cousins, and sisters, who mother each others' children. According to Collins, othermothers are an essential feature of black mothering. While the burdens of motherhood are shared collectively, the othermothers are also valued as educators and care-takers (see Collins 1991, 116-9). Collins explains that othermothering displaces the individualist, capitalist, and patriarchal ideas of "owning the child", which are typical of the nuclear-family model, and considers the networks of othermothers as a revolutionary feature of Black mothering (Collins 1991, 122-3). In addition to othermothers, I will also apply another concept defined by Collins in this chapter. Collins argues that othermothering also includes several kinds of "community othermothers" such as teachers, communal leaders, and other kinds of respected or culturally important female figures in a child's life, who transmit collective morals, ethics, and cultural models (Collins 1991, 131-2).<sup>233</sup> In Cliff's novels, Nanny, Mma Alli, or Mary Ellen Pleasant are all such community othermothers.

Below, I will suggest that in Cliff's novels the concept of motherhood is a cultural theme and a collective force beyond Western nuclear family values. The theme highlights the novels' strong cultural commitment to the Caribbean heritage, anticolonial resistance, and the collective memory. The novels present African Caribbean counter-discourse as a matrifocal narrative. Matrifocal narratives must be re-discovered by the home-seeking daughters of the novels in order to journey towards an identity.

232 In her established study *Black Feminist Thought* (1991) Patricia Hill Collins presents a wide analysis of motherhood in African American culture. Collins deconstructs both the white feminists' and the black men's views concerning the African American motherhood, and identifies stereotypes such as the reckless prostitute, the dominating matriarch, the merry servants, or the self-sacrificing super-mother. See Collins 1991, 116-7.

233 For more on the particular networks of motherhood in the Caribbean area see also Renk 1999, 40-1. Renk labels the social order, within which the child "belongs to several mothers" as *third-world mothering*. According to Renk, the third-world mothering emphasizes strong bonds between a mother and a daughter in contrast to Western, Freudian models which tend to highlight oedipal rejection. Gay Wilentz, for one, uses the concept of *the mothering process of cultural transmission* with which she refers to the collective motherhood (see Wilentz 1992, Introduction).

## 5.1. The Colonized Mother and the Matrilineal Displacement

Motherhood and other familial ties are not free from the effects of colonialist politics. Thus, it is no wonder that postcolonial feminist scholars and authors have been preoccupied with the theme during the last twenty to thirty years. According to Kathleen J. Renk, Caribbean women writers have long responded to the Victorian myths of family, discussed in previous chapter, which “imprisons the mother and daughter within the confines of the convent-garden” (Renk 1999, 36). Renk finds that their responses draw on the notions of the “mother-centred social system prevalent in the Caribbean” which is partly derived from the West African female experience (Renk 1999, 36).<sup>234</sup> In this chapter, I will apply the concept of *matrophilia*, which Renk uses to describe the ways Caribbean women writers represent maternal relations. *Matrophilia* includes the desire to become one’s own womanist mother who represents “strength, resistance, resilience, and connection to both the Caribbean landscape and the spirit world” (Renk 1999, 36). Consequently, Caribbean *matrophilia* is not merely an antonym of *matrophobia*, the fear of becoming one’s mother, which, according to Adrienne Rich, is often experienced by daughters in Western cultures.<sup>235</sup> My aim in the following is to analyze Clare’s problems when trying to find a balance between *matrophobia* and *matrophilia* in her *Bildung* in both *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*. Clare needs to journey towards *matrophilia* by overcoming Kitty’s colonized sense of motherhood.

The representations of motherhood in Caribbean women’s writing must be contextualized in the local systems concerning gender roles and family structures. The narrator of *Abeng* describes the reality of Jamaican women and mothers as follows:

The women in the Tabernacle had their spaces of need also – but for most of them, the space had been reduced over time, so that the filling of it became a matter of family. Their anguish in this life became for them identifiable in the faces of the people they were part of. Their pain was unto themselves. As the men’s relief was unto themselves. But women felt the responsibility for kin – sisters, mothers, children. (A, 16-17.)

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<sup>234</sup> Renk defines three different *topos* Caribbean women writers utilize in deconstructing the Victorian stereotypes of mythical and angelical mothers. First, unlike the isolated queenly English mothers, Caribbean women writers represent mothering networks and maternal communities sharing responsibilities. Second, they praise the mother-centered social systems, and third, they depict mothers as symbols of resistance and as woman-warriors unlike the Western mother who according to Renk “epitomizes passivity” (Renk 1999, 37). All these three *topoi* are also present in Cliff’s novels.

<sup>235</sup> Adrienne Rich introduces *matrophobia* in her study *Of Woman Born* (1986) as “the fear not of one’s mother or motherhood, but of becoming one’s mother: [---]. It can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother’s bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr” (Rich 1986, 235-6).

The women also served. Cleaned. Mopped. Cooked. Cared for babies lighter than their own. Did other people's goods in the markets at Crossroads and Constant Spring. [---]. They saw their children perhaps once a week, if the children were kept in town. Less often if they were not. Many of these women had never been married, but they kept their children and gave them names and supervised their rearing as best they could. Some had been married, but their husbands had left them for America to pick fruit. Or for the north of England to work in factories. Others had husbands employed in the households or hotels in different parts of Kingston – these men lived-in, as did their wives – and over the years these people lost touch. (A, 17.)

Mothers sustain socially significant structures. Indeed, Marietta Morrissey argues that Caribbean family structures are female-centered social networks differing from the Western norms. Morrissey explains that rural families, particularly in Jamaica, are structured around the wide female collectives and are characterized by the mobility of men and the absence of fathers:

She [mother] was generally part of a large network of woman-headed families. In these circumstances, unemployed or marginally employed fathers were a drain of resources. The family ultimately benefited from the father's absence. Matrifocal families were thus economically optimal. Such families were in fact as much woman-focused as they were mother-focused. Often several generations of women lived together, raising children [---]. (Morrissey 1998, 81.)

Morrissey emphasizes that colonial rule strongly discouraged these non-patriarchal families, which seemed to be characterized by the casualty and the promiscuity on the part of women (Morrissey 1998; 79, 89). In the colonial order, white, middle class, and heteropatriarchal family ideals easily became a norm against which all families were measured.

Alongside colonialism, the history of slavery has had a major impact on the Caribbean motherhood.<sup>236</sup> Alma Jean Billingslea-Brown has identified the imprint the traumas of slavery have left on the black feminist literature – such as the over-emphasized role of maternal themes whether mothering and mothers, nurturing, or breast-feeding, which often seems to be a strongly mystified or ritualized act. For her the “sacralization” of maternity results from the times of slavery, when the right to mother their own babies was denied to women of color (Billingslea-Brown 1999, 49-51).<sup>237</sup> Indeed, it seems to be one of the major challenges of post-colonial feminist writing to create reparative representations of motherhood violated by the

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236 For more on the history of slavery and its effects on Caribbean maternity see e.g. Beckles 1998 and 1995, and in the African American context in general see e.g. Carby 1987, 24-30. However, it must be noted, as Rhonda Reddock reminds us, that the issues of matrifocality, female-headed households and “so-called male marginality”, on which the Caribbean feminist historiography has concentrated, are all part of the Afrocentric discourse (Reddock 2001, 204). These issues contrast greatly with, for instance, the Indian Caribbean or White Caribbean experience.

237 Billingslea-Brown analyzes Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon* in particular, within which the act of breast-feeding and the breast milk are important symbols signifying the counter-discourse to slave-maternity. Slave-mothers were forced to be breeders but not for their own babies. However, Carole Boyce Davies, for one, has claimed that breast-feeding and milk must not be romanticized in the context of African American women's writing. For her, the breasts of a black woman and the milk they provide might also symbolize the guaranteed welfare of the upper-class white babies (see Davies 1994, 142-5 and Davies 1991, 51-3). Gayatri Spivak, for one, has written a Marxist-feminist analysis of the breast-milk of the minority women. According to Spivak, the milk has an exchange value in patriarchal capitalist economy (see Spivak 1987, 248).



history of slavery. Deconstructing the colonialist discourses of maternity is also crucial in Cliff's novels, which point out several hierarchies and cultural systems of power affecting the Caribbean mothers. Below, I will illustrate how the effects of colonialism disturb the relationships Clare and Annie have with their mothers.

Clare's light/white skin represents disturbance in her relation to her black-skinned mother.<sup>238</sup> Drawing on colonial logic, Kitty interprets Clare's skin-color as a sign of difference. Kitty does not see herself in Clare and regards her baby as Boy's daughter:

If Kitty could have shared her love-which-proceeded-from-darkness with anyone, it would have been Jennie, her younger, darker child, in the same position at birth as Kitty herself. Maybe someday her breech-born youngest daughter would be admitted onto that place deep in Kitty's soul which she kept guard over. But Clare would never gain admission – she had been handed over to Boy the day she was born [---]. (A, 128.)

Kitty has internalized the biologicistic ideals of colonial politics and of race based on binarisms which allow the color-line penetrate the family-life in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*. Kitty is unable to convey her own sense of Caribbean heritage to Clare, and thus dissolves the matrilineal heritage from Clare's mind. I agree with Noraida Agosto who notes that the "Freemans share the belief in race as a biological trait that defines the self and determines behaviour" (Agosto 1999, 108). Already Miss Mattie teaches to Kitty that "Buckra man is jus' no good a-tall, a-tall. De pickney mus' tek on de blood" (A, 147). In this sense both the Freemans' and the Savages' insights into race are paradoxically similar in the sense that they rely on binarity and biology. In Kitty's mind, her own African Caribbean heritage is too fragile to be taught to Clare. Her own rebellious spirit is lost, bleached out of her mind:

Kitty should have been the daughter of Inez and Mma Alli, and Nanny, too – and had she known of the existence of these women, she might have shared her knowledge, her extraordinary passion, using its strength, rather than protecting what she felt was its fragility. The fragility of her people, on this island intent on erasing the past. (A, 128.)

White mythologies have led her to believe that the Jamaican tradition cannot help Clare, who can pass as white.

Caroline Rody interprets that Kitty's and Clare's ruptured relationship as symbolizing the "historical failure to transmit African women's culture from one generation to next", which reflects "the larger cultural loss that tends to associate Caribbean mother-figures with death and mourning" (Rody 2001, 166). In the novel, Kitty becomes a metaphor of mourning and loss, whose personal relationship to the African heritage becomes "a love conceived in grief":

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<sup>238</sup> Adrienne Rich, for example, has described the identification between a mother and a daughter as something which is marked by an essential sameness: "Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other – beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival – a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other" (Rich 1986, 220). Cliff, however, addresses the differences which disturb their process of identification. These disturbing differences arise from the colonial ideology highlighting color-stratifications.

Kitty's mistake in all of this was casting her people in the position of victim, so that her love of darkness became a love conceived in grief – a love of necessity kept to herself. The revolution had been lost when the first slave ships arrived from the west coast of Africa, and she felt Black people were destined to labor under the oppression of whiteness [---]. (A, 128.)

Kitty does not try to transmit her grief to her whiter daughter. Anuradhan Dingwaney Needham has noted that Clare's and Kitty's relationship represents the differences between a conscious embrace of Blackness and an unselfconscious one. Whereas Kitty is "essentially Black" Clare must "come to possess her Blackness" (Needham 104-5). Clare's 'otherness' is different from Kitty's. Moreover, the difference between Kitty and Clare epitomizes the dualism within postcolonial discussions on identity. Their generational difference might be conceptualized through the theoretical generations between essentialist/authentic 'otherness' and discursive/constituted 'otherness'.

In Cliff's novels, the ambivalent mother-daughter –relationships become approachable through the idea of protection. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory has analyzed the motif of the extreme means the mothers take in protecting their daughters in African American and in Black diasporic women's writing. According to Brown-Guillory, both mothers and daughters pay a high price for the mother's painstaking protective efforts in order to secure their future in the racialized and sexualized world.<sup>239</sup> Kitty's means of extreme protection is to hide her maternal heritage from Clare, to cut her daughter's ties to her African legacy. Clare is to be brought up as unquestionably white. She is taught her father's white mythologies, his Calvinist religion, and his colonialist versions of history. The narrator of *Abeng* explains Kitty's ideas:

Better to have this daughter accept her destiny [as a white] and not give her any false notion of alliance which she would not be able to honor. Let her passage into that otherworld be as painless as possible. Maybe Kitty thought that Clare would only want this thing, to pass into whiteness, looking as she did, speaking well because of her lessons at St. Catherine's, reading English books and English descriptions of history. Perhaps she thought it would be best for her. (A, 129.)

In her own way, Kitty protects Clare by letting her adapt the colonial, bourgeois values. I agree with Françoise Lionnet who interprets Kitty as a "phallic mother", one who "deprives her daughter of that Creole dimension of her own subjectivity" (Lionnet 1992a, 339). Kitty tries to prevent the matrophilial relations from developing, hoping her daughter will have an easier life without a double consciousness – unconsciously causing to her daughter a lifetime sense of homelessness.

However, Kitty also concretely abandons Clare, not once but twice. The first abandonment is depicted in *Abeng* after Clare accidentally shoots Miss Mattie's bull. Clare is sent to live with Mrs. Phillips in order to absorb 'the correct values' suitable for a white girl under this

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239 See Brown-Guillory 1996, 188-93. Maybe the best known example of these extreme measures of protection is Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) which describes Sethe's decision to kill her daughter rather than to allow slavers to take her.

British lady's roof. Kitty tries to separate her daughter from herself by explaining to her that Clare is one of "them" not of "us":

"Jamaica is just a tiny little place. There are no opportunities for someone like you here. I don't want to leave Jamaica because my place is here. But you don't have to be confined by this sad little island. Just take your medicine. Go stay with the old lady and learn what you can from her." [---]. "I said she would teach you things you could use to better yourself. You will just have to overlook that other part. There are many narrow-minded people in this world. You have to learn to live among them." (A, 150-1.)

Paradoxically, Kitty does not give Clare a better life but starts her process of 'zombification', to apply Erna Brodber's term. Simone A. James Alexander uses Brodber's 'zombification' to describe the kinds of mother-daughter relationships in Caribbean literature that are stigmatized by colonialism. For Brodber and Alexander, zombification means "a state wherein one is brutally stripped of knowledge of his or her original world and left as an empty shell or flesh" (Alexander 2001, 19). Mrs. Phillips, for one, becomes a 'wicked stepmother', which in the postcolonial literature often refers to a promoter and a supporter of the colonialist values and ideologies taking the place of the true mother.<sup>240</sup> The second time Kitty abandons Clare is in New York, where she leaves her daughter in the true state of zombification "[n]ot feeling anything, except a vague dread that she belongs nowhere" (NTH, 91). Kitty decides to move back to Jamaica taking along only her youngest daughter, Jennie, who has a darker skin – dividing her family along the color-lines.

Years later, after Kitty's death, Jennie returns to New York to live with Clare and Boy. Jennie arrives "speaking her mother's language, while Clare spoke her father's adopted tongue. One daughter raised in captivity, the other in the wild – so it seemed to Clare" (NTH, 104). Jennie's matrilphial ties remain intact; Clare is left motherless, imprisoned in adopted discourse. Clare cannot tolerate the situation, and decides to leave both Jennie and Boy behind in New York, while she takes off to England "choosing London with the logic of a Creole. This was the mother country. [---]. This was natural" (NTH, 109). However, as I have noted earlier, Clare does not adjust to living in the "mother-country", but experiences an immense sense of loss. She wanders around Europe with Bobby incapable of taking any meaningful action. Clare falls into a situation which could be described as *matrilineal displacement*<sup>241</sup>, meaning a state of losing the cultural bonds mediated by mothers. One side of the ambivalence a colonized subject, like Clare, must bear is the painful realization that the mother-country is not a place where she can feel at home.

240 See about "wicked stepmother" Alexander 2001, 24-5. She applies the term which originates in Gilbert and Gubar's (1984) feminist work.

241 The term *matrilineal displacement* is my own. I am applying the term *matrilineal diaspora* used by Chinosole and Angelita Reyes. However, while *matrilineal diaspora* has a positive resonance referring to "the capacity to survive and aspire, to be contrary and self-affirming across continents and generations" (qtd. in Reyes 2002, 8), I am using the term *matrilineal displacement* to describe the sense of loss of maternal ties.

In *Free Enterprise*, Annie's sense of motherlessness is also founded on the similar mechanisms of the intended protection and the internalized colonialism. In Annie's mind her mother, *Mamà*, becomes connected to the *gens inconnu*, the Creole middle-class majority, which has co-opted the colonial white mythologies in the Caribbean. Annie's mother, in her own way, tries to teach her daughter to aspire to 'the better life' and does not understand Annie's urge to commit herself to the political resistance:

"*Ma fille*," her mother began, "the poor are an investment that will leave you penniless. If you must do this sort of thing, then, for God's sake become a *religieuse*. Go to France, to a proper convent. Teach the poor to make lace. This business can lead nowhere but heartache, your heartache. Will you lend to the disgrace of us all? Your father and I have worked so hard." (FE, 9.)

Annie's *Mamà* seems to be ashamed of her African roots, while, paradoxically, she considers them as her 'home':

When her [Annie's] hair snaked, her mother said it was going back to Africa. "Look like you going home, pickney," she said. And the swashbucklers and petty nobility fell away. Then: "Tell no one I said that, *ma fille*," speaking out of her *gens inconnu* mouth. (FE, 23.)

Annie's mother tries to save her daughter from her own ambivalent shame.

Annie needs to escape her Caribbean home island altogether in order to claim a rebellious identity. She connects her island with her mother, which demoralizes her spirit: "She fell into the movement on the mainland, believing the island to be without hope" (FE, 10). Annie does not hail to the colonial interpellation of her mother, but develops a sense of matrophobia, a fear of becoming her mother. Annie fears what her mother represents, that is the internalized sense of white mythologies. She directs her developing matrophilia towards Mary Ellen. Nevertheless, Annie has feelings of guilt because "she was not strong enough to resist on home ground; it overwhelmed her" (FE, 10). Like Kitty, her relation to the Caribbean remains melancholic.

According to Rody's analysis of the ambivalent mother-daughter -relationships in the Caribbean women's writing the mothers, which she calls as "the middle-generation women" between the feminist daughters and the more traditional grandmothers, are repeatedly represented as "compromised and alienated figures" (Rody 2001, 121). Unconsciously, Annie's mother tries to convey to her daughter the colonial gaze, which does not offer Annie the foundation for a functional identity. The middle-generation embodies the colonial past: in Annie's case she needs to escape her island in order to avoid the cultural "zombification". Later, Mary Ellen Pleasant becomes her "othermother" encouraging her to join John Brown's movement. By the same token, however, Annie's understanding of a family becomes wider: she does not "turn her back on her people" like her *Mamà* claims (FE; 9, 10), but starts to consider all African Americans as her people, her family, thus abandoning the Victorian ideas about the biological nuclear family.

Thus for Rody, the distinctive feature of the Caribbean women's writing is "the figure of the mother-of-forgetting" that embodies the historyless condition of the Caribbean people, a diasporic sense of home, and a deep sense of dispossession (Rody 2001, 110). The daughters need other kinds of motherly models. The othermother- and the grandmother-figures provide these other models in Cliff's novels. The daughterly quest towards identity includes the re-claimed sense of home, the re-possessioned understanding of history, and the re-found connection to their own culture – all qualities represented by the grandmother figures. I think that first and foremost, Clare's return to Jamaica, her seeking of Kitty's grave and her claiming Miss Mattie's farm represent for her the process of locating herself in the Jamaican history and repossessing her cultural heritage. Clare's melancholia caused by her biological mother reflects her longing for an exit from the matrilineal displacement. Clare's yearning for her mother's bosom in *Abeng* articulates her sense of loss:

"Cry-cry baby, suck your mama's titty," children used to taunt one another. At the age of twelve Clare wanted to suck her mother's breasts again and again—to close her eyes in the sunlight and have Kitty close her eyes also and together they would enter some dream Clare imagined mothers and children shared. (A, 54.)

Clare's sense of cultural loss emerges as an abstract yearning for her mother.

However, Kitty's grief and distance are also caused by her longing for her own mother, Miss Mattie. Kitty, for example, feels bitter that Miss Mattie did not take her to the doctor herself when she became severely ill. Instead, Miss Mattie sent Kitty off with a neighbor's daughter called Clary, who was "not quite right in the head" (A, 138). Finally, like Clare a generation later, Kitty finds an intimate connection to her mother only after Miss Mattie's death. When Kitty performs the washing ritual for her mother's corpse, she experiences a deep sense of intimacy, but also, of history:

When she dressed her mother's body [---] it was the first time she remembered seeing her mother's nakedness. This secret thing which had been hidden from her for thirty years became hers, for she was the only member of the family entrusted to it. The breasts full – the nipples dark – were stiff with lifelessness, and she caressed them. *From somewhere came an image of a slave-woman pacing aisles of cane, breasts slung over her shoulder to suckle the baby carried on her back.* (NTH, 71, emphasis added.)

Like Clare, Kitty's connection to her Caribbean history symbolically runs through the mother's breasts. Thus, Kitty and Clare also share something. I agree with William Tell Gifford who notes that the intimate connection to the mother and her body is a problem for both Kitty and Clare (Gifford 2003, 95). For both of them the true matrilineal ties can be found only posthumously.

To conclude, I would like to argue that Cliff's narration widens the boundaries of motherhood. The matrilineal bonds symbolize the postcolonial subject's sense of cultural belongingness. In Caribbean literature, the themes of (lost) origins, a problematic sense of history, and hybridity are all-encompassing. The variations of these themes are often represented through a state of matrilineal displacement. The mother-quest in Caribbean literature often seems to

be a quest towards re-claiming one's cultural and historical background: the remapping of one's matrophilial ties also means a new cartography for cultural heritage. The protagonists need to overcome their matrophobic relationship with their colonized mothers and to negotiate with their matrilineal displacement. Only after that are the daughters capable of resisting, of feeling *at home*. The process of locating oneself culturally and matrilineally opens a way towards a rebellious subjectivity. 'Mothers-of-forgetting' must be replaced with 'mothers-of-remembering'.

## 5.2. Remembering Grandmothers and the Maternal Is/land

In this chapter, I will examine more closely the othermother figures in Cliff's novels. Cliff's othermothers often appear as rebellious grandmothers and mythical ancestresses, the mother-warriors, who constitute the feminist genealogy of Caribbean women's resistance. They emerge in the form of cultural or historical heroines of collective importance. These rebellious othermothers seem to have an enormous symbolic importance for Cliff's protagonists: they provide spiritual guidance for Clare, Annie, and many others on their way towards healing. It could be said that the stories of the othermothers form a fictional tradition of textual rebellion in Cliff's novels, thus conjuring up an anti-colonial discourse beneath colonial mythologies. Therefore, in this chapter I will argue, that the generation of grandmothers constitutes a counterforce for daughters thereby balancing the legacy of the colonized mother. I consider this narrative balancing, once again, an instance of Cliff's dialectic method of discourse and counter-discourse. The heritage of othermothers, cultural ancestresses and rebellious grandmothers also constructs a discursive site where Cliff's 'migrating daughters' can feel *at home*. They serve as an exit from the matrilineal displacement for both Clare and Annie. Finally, Clare herself becomes a rebellious othermother for the Jamaican schoolchildren she teaches, while Annie plays a similar role when she shares her story in the Carville.

According to Rody, the grandmothers in Caribbean literature "tend to be bearers of culture, connected to the land, idealized objects of the daughterly desire to return to" (Rody 2001, 121).<sup>242</sup> In Cliff's fiction, however, the othermothers must also be considered such "objects of desire". Moreover, they highlight the role of 'historical othermothers', the folkloric women characters such as Nanny of the Maroons, as symbols of the decolonial resistance and of the indigenous past. The narrator in *Abeng* tells Nanny's tale as follows:

In the beginning there had been two sisters – Nanny and Sekesu. Nanny fled slavery. Sekesu remained a slave. Some said this was the difference between the sisters. It was believed that all island children were descended from one or the other. All island people were first cousins. (A, 18.)

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242 According to Caroline Rody, authors such as Michelle Cliff, Paule Marshall, Maryse Condé, or Beryl Gilroy, to name a few, repeat a similar storyline with the returning daughters, the middle-generation mothers, and the nurturing grandmothers. Moreover, Rody claims that "all matrifocal texts in recent Caribbean literature are indebted to" Guadeloupean novelist Simone Schwarz-Bart's *La Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (Rody 2001, 121).

The narrator describes Nanny as the mythical mother of all the Jamaican people embodying the matrilineal counter-history. Different kinds of grandmothers have a strong spiritual power in Cliff's novels. The author herself claims that:

Looking back over *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* I find the theme of the grandmother repeated. I try in both of these novels to show the power, particularly the spiritual authority, of the grandmother as well as victimization. Hers is a power directly related to landscape, gardens, planting when the signs are right, burying the placenta and umbilical cord, preparing the dead for burial. This powerful aspect of the grandmother originates in Nanny, the African warrior and Maroon leader. At her most powerful, the grandmother is the source of knowledge, magic, ancestors, stories, healing practises, and food. She assists at rites of passage, protects, and teaches. She is an inheritor of African belief systems, African languages. (Cliff 1990, 266-7.)

For Cliff, the spiritual ancestresses and grandmothers are present in nature, land, and traditions in an all-encompassing manner.<sup>243</sup> Later, in *Free Enterprise*, the myth of Nanny frames the revolutionary narrative of the novel. It is the mythical Annie Christmas, after whom the protagonist Annie is named, who is paralleled with Nanny. They both wear a similar type of a necklace made out of the enemy's body parts (FE, 26 & A, 21).<sup>244</sup> I suggest that the grand- and othermothers characters constitute a genealogical chain of feminist rebellion and embody the ethics of collective change in Cliff's fiction.

Nanny's figure in Cliff's novels becomes what Clarisse Zimra names as the "symbolic ideological Mother", and through whom the "ancestral wisdom is transmitted" (1990, 156). Particularly in *Abeng* and *Free Enterprise* the (grand)mother figures appear more as "symbolic ideological Mothers" than biological ones. Nanny of the Maroons, who is often referred to as Granny Nanny in Caribbean sources, symbolizes the Caribbean maternal mythos. For Wynter, Nanny becomes Sycorax of *The Tempest* embodying the matrilineal sense of the Caribbean history (Wynter 1990). Both Clare and Annie become metaphorical granddaughters of Nanny, committing themselves to resistance while giving voice to "the silent song" of Sycorax.<sup>245</sup>

Ironically enough, some of Cliff's revolutionary othermothers are nannies: Industry, Annie's nanny in *Free Enterprise* tells her stories about Nanny of the Maroons, and Hyacinth,

243 In her study *Daughter's Return* (2001), Caroline Rody names a tendency in Black feminist writing, starting from 1970s, as a Renaissance for mothering. The mothering Renaissance changes the complex mothering representations of the earlier, 50s and 60s African American and African Caribbean literature (Rody 2001, 48). According to Rody, the representation of an African mother emerges in literature in the 1930s along the Négritude-movement symbolizing the myth of origins. Mother Africa united the diasporic people of African origins and displaced the European colonial "father" (Rody 2001, 111-2). However, Rody claims that from the 1980s onwards there emerges a body of literature she names as "matrifocal romances" – meaning a brand new way of conceptualizing black mothers. Now, the mother symbolizes the "reclaimed history". According to Rody, the matrifocal romances gradually create "a black mother-of-history to whom she (the daughter) might wish to return" (Rody 2001, 48). I am willing to connect Cliff's writing, too, to Rody's phase of matrifocal romances, even though her daughter-characters do not re-unite with their biologic mothers but with their cultural othermothers.

244 Moreover, as Bénédicte Ledent notes, Annie is connected to Nanny by the phonetic resemblance of their names (Ledent 2000, 86).

245 Clarisse Zimra names the ancient Caribbean tradition and the lost past as "the silent song of a mother" which is contrasted to the "father's place-time" or to "the logos of the father" (Zimra 1990, 156). The history that Nanny represents in Cliff's novels is lost just as Sycorax's voice in *The Tempest* is lost under Prospero's "logos".



Harry/Harriet's healing nanny in *No Telephone to Heaven*, helps him/her after the brutal rape by consoling Harry/Harriet with reparative trickster-stories. Paradoxically, the nannies emerge as rebellious mediators between children and their biological mothers. In *Free Enterprise*, folkloric ancestresses like Mesopotamia, a true Jamaican woman-warrior, and Yemanja, a powerful West African orisha, are both important othermother-symbols for Mary Ellen. If we also think about minor characters such as Mma Alli, Inez, and Quasheba in Cliff's novels, it can be argued that the counter-memory and rebellious Caribbean history are intertwined with the heritage and actions of the grandmothers and other elderly women. It seems significant to me that later on "nanny" Industry runs away from her employer's house and "turns back into her Nanny-self" (FE, 28). Like the shell-horn abeng, Industry as a nanny and Nanny epitomizes the double-voiced symbolism typical of Cliff's writing.<sup>246</sup> Indeed, Cliff's double-voiced, creolized discourse is present in the choice of the othermother-figure Clare identifies herself with: Bertha Rochester's migrant story reminds her own experiences in England.<sup>247</sup> In Clare's identity process, I think, the key factor is the realization of the simultaneous presence of the dual maternal heritage and moving towards the continuum of creolized or displaced othermothers.

Consequently, the loss of one's grandmother is a major tragedy. The theme is illustrated by the story of Christopher alias De Watchman<sup>248</sup> in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Christopher is brought up by his grandmother, who, even in a downtown shanty, does not forget her African heritage. The grandmother represents the tradition which would have been vital to the boy's identity. After her death, Christopher becomes an eternal escaper, a lonely wanderer, living in the streets haunted by his grandmother's unburied spirit. He sleeps in the graveyard and turns into an antisocial person, a marginalized "other", who is metaphorically depicted as sitting "in the shadow of Victoria's statue" (NTH, 179). Christopher's tragedy is that he is not able to bury his grandmother properly, because the officials have taken her remains somewhere "where the government put the bodies of the poor people" (NTH, 45), and her restless spirit is hungry for revenge against the white middle-class. After Christopher has had a strong vision of his grandmother, he decides to go to his employer's house to beg for a little money for "give she funeral, me know she nuh res' " (NTH, 46). However, his employer, Mas Charles, only ridicules his request. Christopher's fury is now untamed. He ends up violently killing Mas Charles, his wife, their children, their housekeeper, and their dog. The killings are almost like the grandmother's revenge: her spirit acts through her grandson and whispers to him at the fatal moment "Be

246 The highlighted textual presence of multiple grand- and foremother figures, I think, is also interesting in terms of genre theory. The simultaneous voices of several generations in Cliff's novels confuse and co-opt the novel genre as an individualist form of narrating. As Alexander argues, the voices of ancestresses are transformed into "the voice of community" (Alexander 2001, 33). Alexander illustrates this with the concept of "collaborative storytelling" coined by Carole Boyce Davies, which de-centers the individual subject and replaces the "authorial subject" with the collaboration of the self and the community (Alexander 2001, 34-5).

247 Cliff herself has named Bertha Rochester as one of Clare's foremothers (Cliff 1990, 265 & 267).

248 After his murderous acts, Christopher becomes re-named as De Watchman by the people in the Kingston ghetto. The narrator explains his new name: "A reggae singer wrote a song about him. About de watchman of downtown walking up and down. To tell we when de bu'n it down. Him call fe bu'n. Bu'n de damn t'ing down. Bu'n all Jamaica downtown. People say him mad, dem say him clown, but de truth will come when we bu'n de fockin' place down" (NTH, 179).



quick of hand, mi son" (NTH, 47).<sup>249</sup> Unlike Clare, Christopher cannot find his connection to the mother/land but remains unable to direct his anger productively.

The motifs of burials and (grand)mother's graves are central in Cliff's fiction. One of the most important catalysts of Clare's journey for identity and selfhood is her visit to the grave of the Indian princess Pocahontas in England. Like William Gifford argues, Clare starts seeing herself like Pocahontas "dying in England so that England would claim her body" (Gifford 2003, 94). After the visit, Clare knows that "something was wrong" (NTH, 137) and realizes that she cannot stay in England. Cliff herself has explained the transnational matrophilial relationship between Clare and Pocahontas: "When Clare Savage recognizes Pocahontas in that graveyard in Gravesend she makes a choice, begins a series of choices, which will take her from the mother country back to the country of her grandmother, her own" (Cliff 1990, 268). Later in Jamaica Clare tells the Guerrillas that "I returned to this island to mend ...to bury...my mother.... I returned to this island because there was nowhere else..." (NTH, 192). Ultimately, Pocahontas becomes an important segment of Clare's continuum of displaced othermothers. Her lonely grave in Britain gives Clare a reason to journey towards her grandmother.

I agree with Belinda Edmondson who claims that the unburied maternal bodies, like Nanny's, remind the reader of "the invisibility of black women in the narration of West Indian oppositional discourse, as embodied by Caliban's mother, the absent Sycorax" (Edmondson 1993, 189-90). The burial represents the final reconciliation with the maternal history. It is no co-incidence, I think, that *Free Enterprise*, too, ends with the description of the graves of Mary Ellen and her parents. While Captain Parsons is buried in Africa, it is Quasheba's grave which is familiar to Mary Ellen. After Quasheba's death, her arms are handed to Mary Ellen in a ceremony highlighting the fact that the abolitionist resistance is carried on through matrilineal ties. Finally, Mary Ellen's rebellious cause is symbolically celebrated at her own grave too: "SHE WAS A FRIEND OF JOHN BROWN" (FE, 213) is the only text she chooses to be engraved on her tombstone.

The othermother figures pave the way of the rebellious identity construction in Cliff's novels. Clare's identity process is bridged over 'the colonized middle generation mothers' as she finally moves into Miss Mattie's house with her guerrilla group in the end of *No Telephone to Heaven*. The grandmothers' memory is, however, catalyzing her decision-making already in Europe. Harry/Harriet sends her a newspaper article depicting a tragic accident in Jamaica: it is about a huge fire which killed 167 old women. Harry/Harriet writes that "today we are supposed to be remembering our grandmothers" (NTH, 160). Directly after the letter, a new chapter begins called "Magnanimous Warrior". Thus Clare's story in *No Telephone to Heaven* is suspended. It is an abstract mytho-poetic vision about an unnamed warrior ancestress:

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249 For more on Christopher's revenge see e.g. Renk 1999, 57-9.

Magnanimous Warrior! She in whom the spirits come quick and hard. Hunting mother. She who forages. Who knows the ground. [...] Warrior who sheds her skin like a snake and travels into the darkness a fireball. Mother who catches the eidon and sees them to their rest. Warrior who labours the spirit. [...]. Obeah-woman. Myal-woman. She can cure. She can kill. She can give jobs. The bearer of the second sight. [...] What has become of this warrior? Now that we need her more than ever. [...]. *Can you remember how to love her?* (NTH, 163-4, emphasis added.)

Rody interprets the Magnanimous Warrior figure as somebody who “ventures to solve the problem of the lost mother-of-history by recreating her as a warrior” (Rody 2001, 126-7). I propose that the Magnanimous Warrior emerges in the text to guide Clare away from her matrilineal displacement.

The narrator turns back to Clare’s story in the chapter called the “Homebound” after the Magnanimous Warrior –passage. Directly after reading the letter from Harry/Harriet, Clare decides to book a boat passage to Kingston, journeying like her African ancestors. Back in Miss Mattie’s village, Clare has clear mission: she starts to identify herself “through her female line” (NTH, 185) and carries on with the customs Miss Mattie had. She for example distributes the guerrillas’ surplus food to the villagers. By claiming her grandmother’s heritage Clare also claims her own cultural place freeing herself from the matrilineal displacement. Even though the house is covered in bush when the guerrillas arrive, they clear it by “swinging their blades against the tough bush” and “some of them thought about their grandparents, thought: yes, this is for them too” (NTH, 10). Finally Clare is ready to state that she is “a woman who has reclaimed her grandmother’s land” (NTH, 91). This is a homecoming for her.

Like the episode of clearing the bush in the name of the grandparents illustrates, in Cliff’s fiction, the sites of maternal connections are deeply rooted in the Jamaican nature and landscape. Jamaica is not a mother-country but a mother-land – embodying the matrilineal tradition. The author herself describes this in an essay as follows:

I understand the landscape of our island as female. For me, the land is redolent of my grandmother and mother; it is a deeply personal connection. The same could be said of Clare Savage, who seeks out the grandmother’s farm as she would seek out her grandmother and mother. There is nothing left but the land, and it is infused with the spirit and passion of these two women. (Cliff 1990, 266.)

Several scholars have noted that the island nature always emerges in feminist terms in Cliff’s fiction as her landscape is feminized. Wendy Walters, for one, writes that *No Telephone to Heaven* “enacts a remapping of the Jamaican landscape in feminized, perhaps nostalgically maternal terms” (Walters 1998, 222). Kitty, too, becomes finally identified in Clare’s mind with the home island and its nature in *No Telephone to Heaven*. The Jamaican soil, earth, and bush seem to

materialize the de-colonizing matrilineal heritage.<sup>250</sup> Even though the colonized mothers may be unavailable to their daughters, the matrophilial ties can be renewed through the return to the mother's land. As Walters explains, Clare's "remapping", that is to say her identity journey, demands the denial of "colonial cartography" (Walters 1998, 222). Clare must overcome her matrilineal displacement, not by finding her mother, but by returning to her mother's land.

After Clare has overcome her matrophobia and found her matrilineal ties, she herself does not need symbols anymore. As a clare and a savage she seems to become an emblem of Jamaican history. She explains to one of the guerrillas: "I'm not outside this history – it's a matter of recognition...memory...emotion. When I study Tom Cringle's silk cotton tree, I wonder about the fact that I have never been able to bear a necklace around my throat...not even a scarf" (NTH, 194). Clare embodies Jamaican history, she materializes it in her body and in her skin by actually feeling the pains of hung slaves around her neck.<sup>251</sup>

The tradition of othermothers and grandmothers generates feminist, rebellious, and brave actions and finally – produces a generation of feminist daughters. Finally, Mary Ellen, Annie, and Clare all learn the meaning of feminist daughterhood. However, in Cliff's novels feminist emancipation is much more than freeing oneself from internalized colonialism; it means the re-definition of gendered and sexual identities. As I start to move towards the themes of daughterhood, gender, and sexuality in my study, it is important to note that, besides the counter-historical function, the othermothers and the grandmothers also have a sexually emancipating role in Cliff's novels. It is a role the middle-generation-mothers do not reach. Without the othermothers, Cliff's daughters are not ready to face the "men's world". Simone A. James Alexander, for example, interprets that the biological motherhood is more mediated by colonialism in Caribbean women's writing than the relationship between the daughter and the grandmother – or the othermother. She concludes that the biological mother is often unable to "extend the passion of which surrogate mothers and grandmothers are capable", because the mother-daughter relationship is "mediated by colonization" (Alexander 2001, 68). For example,

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250 In this light, Cliff's representations of mothers and grandmothers may seem binary and dualistic: elements such as motherliness, the Caribbean, and the rebellious are contrasted to the patriarchal and the colonial. However, as Belinda Edmondson reminds us, even Nanny's figure includes ambivalent characteristics. The Maroons also have "another, less glorious history" as they collaborated with the British by promising them to "capture any future runaways" (Edmondson 1998, 83). Edmondson concludes that "the dueling images of warrior and collaborator are fused" in Nanny (1998, 83). Like an abeng that Nanny is known to have used, her voice has two sounds. The mythical ancestress, too, is subordinate to Cliff's ultimate logic of the dialectics between the story and the counter-story, the myth and the counter-myth. Therefore, I am ready to argue that Cliff's representations always emerge with complicated, creolized, and ambivalent elements.

251 Tom Cringle's Cotton Tree was named after a character in a popular novel entitled *Tom Cringle's Log* (1834) by Michael Scott. This ceiba or silk cotton tree was growing in St. Catherine, where Miss Mattie's house is located in Cliff's novels. Tom Cringle's Cotton Tree was a known land-mark in St Catherine. It was used as a marker between the three plantations and as the 100th milestone marker for Kingston. Tom Cringle's Cotton Tree collapsed in 1971, which was headline news in Jamaica. Silk cotton trees are a common subject of Jamaican folklore, legends, and beliefs. For example, it is said that one should never take an axe to a cotton tree without first sprinkling some white rum on it, for fear of the spirits that lie within. Specific types of duppies are said to dwell at the roots of cotton trees. Rumor has it that at some point during its history the Cringle Cotton Tree was used as a hanging tree for rebellious slaves and that those duppies haunted the tree thereafter. (See Senior 2003, 489 and 134; Rebecca Tortello in *The Gleaner*, and A, 144).

giving sexual instruction often seems impossible for the biological mothers, whose motherhood is imbued with Victorian myths of sexual purity.

In *Abeng*, Clare and Zoe are left without proper sexual instruction. They do not fully understand how a baby can appear from a woman's belly, or if it is true that a rare disease can turn girls into men (A, 102-3). Rape, however, is known to them because they are counseled by Miss Mattie that "they should watch themselves around men because they might tempt the men without knowing" (A, 104). Otherwise their information about sex and sexuality rests on the scandal tabloids they secretly read:

The second story in the paper scared them as much as the first one had. It was about a five-year-old girl in Peru who had given birth to a baby boy. Although the writer of the article reported that in "tropical countries" girls menstruated earlier than in "temperate countries," neither Zoe nor Clare had yet, and they were sceptical about this statement of science. (A, 103.)

The filament [...] – *that their bodies might not belong to them* – tightened around the girls. (A, 105 emphasis added.)

The racist piece of news scares the girls. They begin to realize that their own bodies might not belong to them but to men and their world. In fact, heterosexuality and reproduction often appear as frightening and uncontrollable in Cliff's novels. Erotic desire, instead, is directed towards the intimacy between women and towards the female body. Clare and Zoe also become acquainted with the issues of sexuality between themselves. However, *Abeng* also has erotic othermothers, such as an obeah-healer Mma Alli. She is the true "community othermother" of the novel symbolizing Cliff's decolonial maternal ethos. She, ultimately, embodies all the axes of Cliff's counter-discourse: those connected to lesbian love, spiritual tradition, and matrilineal history.<sup>252</sup>

To conclude, in Cliff's novels, the grandmother's and the othermother's tradition contains a rebellious potential appearing as a route from matrophobia to matrophilia for the daughter characters. The postcolonial journey of the Caribbean daughter takes a curve via grandmothers towards the feminist daughterhood. I would like to argue that in Cliff's novels both Clare and Annie ultimately need to take their distance from their colonized mothers and the matrilineal home is/land in order to re-trace their rebellious selves. The grandmother's tradition could be interpreted as a counter-discourse in the novels, not only to colonialism and racism, but also to patriarchalism and (hetero)sexism. The axes of race, gender, and sexuality always seem simultaneous and intersecting in Cliff's postcolonial re-writings. The matrilineal conceptualizations make no difference: the matrilineality in Cliff's fiction diverts white mythologies in decolonial and queer directions. This, I think, separates Cliff's representations from the exclusive ideologies of Afrocentricism, panafricanism or Négritude. Her characters' journey towards grand-

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252 See more for Mma Alli, Caribbean nature and lesbian sexuality in chapter 6.1.

mothers and ancestresses is not towards romanticized mythical origins, but towards feminist re-conceptualizations of the Caribbean daughter's quest for identity.

### 5.3. Beyond Biologisms: The Rise of the Feminist Daughter

Cliff's novels are fertile texts, especially if we are to analyze the constitution of the daughter's identity and how it is affected by the broken maternal bonds. All of Cliff's novels depict the fragmented nature of a daughter's identity emerging from a lack of mutual identification between the mother and the daughter. Therefore my aim in this chapter is to interrogate identities of daughters in Cliff's novels. I will examine the ways in which daughters are able to re-claim their matrilineal heritage, even when it is disowned for the daughters by their own mothers. I will explore how Cliff's novels move beyond the parental and the racial biologisms in the process of re-claiming one's matrilineal tradition. I will argue that the re-definition of parental bonds beyond these biologisms creates a discursive space for a Caribbean feminist daughter who is able to rebel and resist. I suggest that, ultimately, it is the rise of the resisting feminist daughterhood which epitomizes the ethos of Cliff's decolonial textual rebellion.

In her study *Looking Like What You Are* (2001), Lisa Walker examines the significance the process of maternal identification has for a daughter's identity constitution and draws from the feminist criticisms of Freudian psychoanalysis. For Walker, identification is a mechanism which produces "both self-recognition and the apprehension of 'difference'" while pointing where "the psychological and the social converge" (Walker 2001, 141). Walker draws heavily on the ideas of Diana Fuss who emphasizes that the daughter's identification with the mother represents "the predominance of similitude over difference" because, in psychoanalytical terms, a "girl's primary identification with her mother in the mirror-stage, prior to the oedipal narrative of subject constitution" marks "the child's entrance into the realm of the social" (Walker 2001, 142). At the moment of identification, she explains, a "subject seeks alignment with a figure that, reflecting its own idealized image of itself, evokes the sensation of wholeness and plenitude" (Walker 2001, 144). Both Annie's and Clare's mothers are, however, "phallic mothers", to use Antonia MacDonald-Smythe's terms, who urge their daughter to accept the patriarchal law as their primary survival strategy. The daughters must assimilate colonial values like a chameleon without drawing a veil over their racial/maternal origins. (See MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 113). The failed identification, losing the phantasm of sameness, may, according to Walker, lead to a traumatic fragmentation of identity leaving the daughters seeking new figures with whom to identify (Walker 2001, 145). In all of Cliff's novels, the daughters are forced to seek out new figures for maternal identification in order to establish their own identity.

The question concerning the phantasmatic maternal identification, I propose, is essential in Cliff's narration. The matrilineal tradition of ancestresses, grandmothers, mothers, and daughters becomes a focal element in the process of identity constitution and in the practice of

re-writing history in her novels. The fragmented identity of the female protagonists is caused by the lack of matrilineal, Caribbean connections. On the one hand, the internalized colonialism of their “phallic mothers” obscures the daughters from the very tradition they seek. On the other hand, different kinds of othermothers constitute a network to counterbalance the influence of the phallic mothers. Their task is to connect the daughters with the tradition of rebellious women. I agree with Walker, who, in analyzing the Clare Savage –novels, claims that Clare has to “reconstruct the body of Other – the woman of color who has been inaccessible to Clare – by creating alternative genealogies to the patriarchal, colonialist ones that Boy Savage embodies” (Walker 2001, 173). Kitty, like Pauline Breedlove in Morrison’s *Bluest Eyes*, breaks off her daughter’s identification by emphasizing their difference. Neither Clare nor Annie is able to consider themselves as a “whole” woman because their reflection from their mothers underlines the difference.<sup>253</sup>

In *Abeng* Clare compensates her distant relationships with Kitty by identifying strongly with two stories of Jewish girls she has read. Both Anne Frank’s tragic story in *The Diary of a Young Girl* and Kitty Hart’s story in *I Am Alive*, which depicts Kitty Hart’s survival during the Holocaust, greatly affect her. Clare wonders why Anne died and why Kitty survived. She comes to the conclusion that the reason was Anne’s remote mother, whereas Kitty Hart had a warm and committed mother. The narrator of *Abeng* mentions that, paradoxically, Anne Frank calls her well-known diary as “Kitty”. Clare ponders:

Would Anne have lived to see her liberation if her mother had been different? Would Anne’s mother have been different if the Holocaust had not happened? Where was the source of her coldness? Where did her remoteness come from? The mother of Kitty Hart, about whom they had not made a movie, stood in contrast to the mother of Anne Frank. She had fought for her daughter’s survival. She had stolen food from the dead for her. She had hidden her when she was sick, so her daughter wouldn’t be selected for death. Did Kitty survive because her mother had confronted the horror and taught her daughter to live through days? (A, 79-80.)

I agree with Lisa Walker who claims that, in Clare’s mind, the mother of Kitty Hart constitutes a fantasy of a devoted mother (Walker 2001, 173). Clare firmly decides not to name her own diary “Kitty” as this would be untrue to her remote relationship to her own mother. Clare’s questions in the passage reflect the ones she would like to pose to her own mother about the history of slavery. Clare’s identification with Jewish girls, like Anne Frank and Kitty Hart, symbolizes Cliff’s transnational ethos emphasizing the sense of solidarity between Jews and colonized

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253 See also Backes 2001. Nancy Backes has analyzed the representation of mother-daughter bonds in Michelle Cliff’s, Paule Marshall’s and Toni Morrison’s novels. Backes utilizes the theories of Jacques Lacan in her analysis. Lacan uses the term *mirror stage* to name the stage, where the child strengthens her self-image and re-assures “the child who sees in the reflection that the inchoate body actually is a whole self” (qtd. in Backes 2001, 151). Clare’s symbolic mirror reflects a picture of difference which disturbs the development of her identity. This is a central theme in all Cliff’s literary works, including her recent short stories.

people<sup>254</sup> – as well as the textual nature of identities in Cliff's novels. Clare's sense of mother/daughter bonds consist of cultural of scripts, such as the afore-mentioned literary texts.

Indeed in *No Telephone to Heaven*, I argue, Clare's identity is constituted more in relation to the growing number of cultural scripts, including histories and folklore, about the Caribbean matrilineal genealogy than in relation to biological/psychological identification process. However, it seems to be her *fantasy of unbroken identification* with her mother that leads Clare – with the aid of several othermothers – towards the matrilineal tradition. The novel describes the process of uniting fragments of cultural and matrilineal scripts in Clare's mind. 'The mother' who emerges as a textual construction which must be found and recognized. One piece of this 'textual mother' is the black collective that Kitty represents in Clare's mind. When Boy tells Clare about Kitty's death, he accuses as her follows:

"You callous little bitch. I suppose you have more feeling for niggers than for your own mother." [---].

Clare breathed deep, looked full into his furious face.

"My mother was a nigger" – speaking the word at him. His five long fingers came at her, as she had expected, marking her cheekbone, making her weep at shock. "And so am I," she added softly. (NTH, 104, emphasis added.)

Kitty's death marks the first occasion on which Clare identifies with the African Jamaican population. By pronouncing the words "so am I" Clare posits herself in the matrilineal continuum with Kitty, thus claiming the discursive position of 'Other'. I suggest that, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, maternal relations are constituted in a chain of discursive iteration, within which Clare commits herself to re(citing) the matrilineal scripts rather than to biological mother-daughter bonds.

Before Kitty was married, her greatest dream had been to found a school for black children on Miss Mattie's lands. Her ambition was to write her own teaching manuals which would replace the colonial ones – even "go beyond Mr. Powell's teachings" (A, 129). These dreams collapse as a result of her unwanted pregnancy and her forced marriage with a 'Buckra man' (A, 129-30). Eventually, it is Clare who carries out Kitty's dreams after her return to Jamaica. Clare becomes a teacher, a guerrilla, an owner of Miss Mattie's lands, and a bearer of her grandmother's name.<sup>255</sup> The white daughter whom Kitty abandoned becomes the heiress of her heritage after deconstructing the biologist and colonialist politics of identity. Thus, in Cliff's novels, the quest for the daughters seems to be a passage through internalized colonial

254 This is not a single occasion in Cliff's works but present in almost all of her works. The parallel thematization of Anti-Semitism and colonialism becomes particularly clear in a poem called "A Visit to the Secret Annex" in *Land of Look Behind*. The lyrical I of the poem talks about "the horrors not exact – but similar" (LLB, 104). See more for the significance of Anne Frank and Judaism in Abeng e.g. Renk 1999, 144-6. Kitty's inability to teach Clare how to survive in a colonial society is paralleled with Anne Frank's mother's inability to protect her daughter in a concentration camp, at least in Clare's mind.

255 See more for the analysis of the relationship between Clare and Kitty e.g. Gifford 2003, 89-91 and Walker 2001, 171-4.



mythologies in order to find their matrilineal genealogy. In fact, one of the main motifs in Cliff's novels, I think, is a journey the daughter has to take – the Caribbean journey not shadowed by white mythologies. The passage must be taken on her own terms. In Clare's case, these terms are feminism and anti-colonial resistance. Together with Harry/Harriet, Clare's character also displaces the essentialist concerns of subjectivity as they both underline the performative nature of identity categories: Clare's passage towards blackness and Harry/Harriet's quest for femininity emerge beyond biologist paradigms.

In Cliff's novels, maternal identifications are indeed disturbed by several power-discourses, such as colonialism, patriarchalism, or racism. Such disturbances, I think, underline the social/performative constitution of the identification processes of the novels. I agree with Lisa Walker who claims that Cliff's novels show "how female identification is always social, always *interrupted by cultural markers of difference*" (Walker 2001, 181). The "impossibility of complete identity" is rendered visible in the constant mobility and the socially negotiated nature of the depicted identities. However, I consider it noteworthy that the rebellious daughters are white/light-skinned in Cliff's novels. The lost history of African Caribbean women is re-written and re-claimed by white/light Creole daughters emphasizing the anti-biologist nature of Cliff's narrative discourse.<sup>256</sup> Therefore, I think it is fair to argue that Cliff's textual rebellion reaches the areas of identification and subject constitution moving them beyond essentialist or biologist paradigms.

It is not too far-fetched, I think, to consider another aspect of maternity in Cliff's novels, namely the theme of refusing/losing the possibility of motherhood. The refusal too, deconstructs the biologist discourses dominating the themes of maternity and reproduction. Caroline Rody has analyzed the theme of refusal, which according to her, is not uncommon in Caribbean feminist writing. Rody conceptualizes the theme of refusing motherhood as a feminist protest against the conventional identification of women as mothers. According to Rody, there is a corpus of Caribbean women's writing, which foregrounds maternity "by refusing and revising it" (Rody 2001, 125; see also 124). For Rody, the daughters who refuse maternity "claim new mastery of their relationship to history" by "symbolically declaring that the traumatic historical chain stops here" (Rody 2001, 125). While embodying the search of feminist counter-history, characters such as Clare, Annie, and Mary Ellen reject the myth of women's body as a site of reproduction. Later, Mary Ellen becomes a warrior-othermother to Annie, Annie has maternal sentiments in Carville, and Clare grows to be a community othermother for rural Jamaican children in the school where she teaches. As textual othermothers, they reproduce rebellious feminist daughters. They represent warrior-mothers who turn around the subject positions racist/colonial society presses on women of color. The idea of the warrior-mother combines political activism with the themes of maternity and home-building (re)producing narrative subject positions which are not defined by patriarchal or biologist ideals.

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256 For more on the anti-biologist textual rebellion see e.g. Edmondson 1999, 122-3.



The rebellious daughters in Cliff's novels are always somewhat queered. While Clare falls in love with Zoe and Harriet, Annie and Mary Ellen dismantle the (hetero)sexual norms in *Free Enterprise*.<sup>257</sup> All of them direct their phantasmatic identifications also towards queer-othermothers such as Mma Alli or Nanny. In Cliff's novels lesbian sexuality, the black female body, and African Caribbean heritage unite in characters who substitute phallic mothers by emerging as cultural warrior-othermothers. Walker has analyzed queered maternal identifications particularly in Cliff's novels. She felicitously argues that they interrogate "colonial race relations by critiquing the fiction of pure identification and by figuring lesbian sexuality as a response to the disruption of both female identification and racial affiliation as related aspects of subject formation" (Walker 2001, 167).<sup>258</sup> Clare, Mary Ellen, and Annie do not need biological maternity to fulfill their gendered identity; they subvert the maternal subject position towards cultural, collective motherhood. I agree with Rody who argues, that the heroines of Caribbean women's writing range "from mythic ancestresses to present-day daughters, who privilege over conventional motherhood the spiritual role of mother of a nation" while they refuse to "make the traditional female entrance into history as someone's mother" but "claim the right to make her own entrance into history, that is, *to make history*, herself" (Rody 2001, 97). Emblematically, Mary Ellen confesses to Annie that "I probably should have had children. Since I didn't, you will have to do; be my heir. [---]. I bequeath to you the story of my life" (FE, 142). Out of the heroines of Cliff's novels, none becomes a biological mother, but they act as mothers socially, in the context of shared cause or struggle.

When Clare returns to Jamaica she is no longer compelled to lean on the Victorian binary of the marriage and the maternity. For Clare, the loss of biological maternity also means liberation from the matrix of heterosexual patriarchy. This connects her to the tradition of resistance, which in Cliff's novels appears as a *queered tradition*. Her non-biological guerrilla-family revises the idea of maternity in terms of the "cognatic family lines"<sup>259</sup> of Maroon-history. Clare does not give birth but becomes herself re-born in the name of her grandmother. In the beginning of *No Telephone to Heaven*, while standing on the platform of the truck with other guerrillas, Clare emblematically asks herself: "Had she a child would she be on this truck? *On her way to restoration?*" (NTH, 93, emphasis added). It is noteworthy, I think, that while the other-mother institution displaces the individualist, biological and Western discourses of motherhood, it simultaneously supersedes the hetero-centric discourses of family. As Angelina Reyes notes, it is inherent in Caribbean culture that a woman does not necessarily need to give birth to be a mother or to speak about maternity (Reyes 2002, 97). In Cliff's novels, the biological mothers have internalized the colonial values or the cultural melancholy from which the daughters need

257 For more on Annie's and Mary Ellen's sexual un-normativity see Chapter 6.3.

258 Here Walker mainly focuses on *Abeng*, but I think that this argument is valid throughout Cliff's novels.

259 "Cognatic family line" is a term Jean Besson uses in her studies of the ideas of family, kinship, and descents in the Jamaican Maroon communities. In Maroon communities, 'a family' is not formed by people connected by biological blood bonds but consists of complex network of cognatic descents, community endogamy, and in the traditional kinships, such as shipmate bonds. The whole community traces the family-lines from Nanny, thereby forming a cognatic family line. (See Besson, 1998, 136-9.)

to liberate themselves. I suggest, that the novels revision alternatives to hetero-patriarchal family structures, marriage, and biological motherhood by depicting queer-agency, othermothers and reparative same-sex relationships, which I will discuss more below. I agree with Evelyn O'Callaghan who argues that in Cliff's novels the dysfunctional maternal relationships echo the failed heterosexual partnership in general (see O'Callaghan 1998, 304-8). Heterosexual marriage and pregnancy are neither axiomatic nor self-evident in Cliff's representations.

However, one more interpretation remains unarticulated and the revised inscriptions of motherhood in Cliff's novels also lead to other kinds of conclusions. Both O'Callaghan and Wendy W. Walters claim that the loss of a biological mother and motherhood in *No Telephone to Heaven* is followed by a renewed relationship with the motherland. For Walters, Clare donates her birthright, her grandmother's land, to the guerrillas "to help ensure a future for Jamaica's children" (Walters 1998, 229). Clare is, in the end, free to re-discover her island, its nature and landscape that Kitty has known and loved. In the land she finally finds her own mother too. In the bush at Miss Mattie's lands Clare thinks: "I was blessed to have her here. Her passion of place. Her sense of the people. Here is her; leave it at that" (NTH, 174). Clare makes the political decision to choose her mother's land and heritage, when she realizes that her home is in the resistant guerrilla coalition. For Walters, Clare "exercises political agency" and chooses the Jamaican landscape, "not the nation-state of Jamaica" (Walters 1998; 229, 219), that is to say, she does not find the garden but the wildness. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff's feminized landscape emerges as motherly. O'Callaghan seems to share Walters' conclusion as she claims that "the link between loss of the mother's body for Clare and for Harry/Harriet, and their tortured path to recovery of the *motherland* via different sexual and political choices, is clearly made" in the novel (O'Callaghan 1998, 311). Many scholars have acknowledged the close links between colonialism, nationalism, motherhood, and policing women's bodies. I argue that Cliff's novels examine these links and revise them towards feminist, queer, and de-colonizing directions by creating counter-discourses out of the Caribbean maternal land and nature.

To conclude, I would like to claim that the conventional inscriptions connected to the colonial motherhood are radically re-written in Cliff's novels. They are subverted and deconstructed through representations, which could be called as lesbian-sensitive forms of historical (or ancestral) othermothering. The lesbian-sensitive historical othermother, metaphorically, re-produces a radical feminist subject and initiates her to the matrilineal tradition of resistance. I think that through her subversive textuality, her textual rebellion, Cliff completes the very mission Audre Lorde has articulated as follows: "We can learn to mother ourselves. [...] We must establish authority over our own definition....It means that I affirm my own worth by committing myself to my own survival."<sup>260</sup> Cliff's novels create an inscription for "the discursive mother" who is able give birth to a postcolonial, Caribbean queer subject.

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260 Quoted in Browdy de Hernandez 1998, 259.

## 6. From Sexual Identity Poetics to Intersectional Queer Practices

Sexuality in Michelle Cliff's novels is always a key factor through which the other axes of identifications are experienced. In the chapter above, I demonstrated how Cliff's re-writings of Caribbean feminist histories of resistance are queered. However, in her novels 'queer' is always connected, alongside with her representations of Caribbean myths and oral histories, with those processes which question naturalized and monolithic categorizations. Therefore, I have a four-fold argument in this chapter: First, my aim is to consider the contribution black feminist aesthetic provided for later poststructural queer theorizing, and better yet, to the "second generation" or intersectional queer theorizing considering sexuality through other categories of identity. In this first task I will draw on Linda Garber's arguments in *Identity Poetics: Lesbian Feminist Roots of Queer Theory* (2001). Garber considers identity poetics a third term between "grounded identity politics and fluid positionality" arising from the texts of working-class/lesbians of color (Garber 2001, 1). Second, I will argue that Cliff's texts from the 1980s should be connected to the lesbian feminist roots of queer theory, and more explicitly, perceived as part of the lesbian feminist of color -genealogy of intersectional queer studies. This is a task which, oddly enough, remains widely undone within academic postcolonial and transnational feminist field of studies.

My third objective moves beyond the black feminist aesthetics of the eighties towards the postcolonial queer studies and more intersectional considerations of queered identities which emerged at the turn of the twenty first century. I will draw on the queer of color critique theorized, for example, by Roderick Ferguson in his book *Aberrations in Black* (2004) while analyzing the contemporary challenges posed on poststructuralist queer theorizing. The fourth, and most important, task of this chapter is thus to provide a queered reading of Cliff's novels and to demonstrate how each of them provide different kinds of tools for conceptualizing queered sexualities and multi-focal politics of desire. Thus, my queer reading of Cliff's novels also becomes an interpretation of the theoretical context it draws on. Ongoing negotiations

between ethnic, sexual, class and gendered categorizations are typical of Cliff's novels. These negotiations move beyond conventional categorizations of identity thus losing the illusion of static and monolithic subjectivities. Both *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Free Enterprise* unsettle conventional identity categories and imagine new ones: the novels demonstrate how different axes of identity, such as sexuality, class, ethnicity, or gender, can be articulated only through each other.

I am aware that my project, by moving from the lesbian feminist reading, through the poststructural queer theorizing towards more intersectional considerations of queer, might seem to resemble the developmentalist, teleological narrative I criticized above, although this is not my intention. It is important to acknowledge that different kinds of conceptualizations of sexual identities are always in a dialogue. It is a matter of multiple negotiations and ongoing dialectics: for example lesbian feminism has not simply "evolved into" or "been replaced by" other kinds of categorizations. Rather, they are all needed in different kinds of literary contexts. My intention is to examine the plural ways Michelle Cliff outlines sexualities and sexual identities in her fiction. In following chapters I will, on the one hand, demonstrate for example how Clare's fluctuation between the racial borders is juxtaposed with Harry/Harriet's movement between genders in *No Telephone to Heaven*, whereas *Free Enterprise* deconstructs the idea of lesbian identity by focusing on the particularities of sexual agencies intertwined with other identifications and situated experiences. *Abeng*, on the other hand, focuses on homosexuality in the Jamaican context. It criticizes and reveals localized forms of homophobia, while imagining decolonizing queer/lesbian forms of Caribbean histories.

## 6.1. Lesbian Feminist Aesthetics in *Abeng*

During the early 1980s many feminists of color, including many lesbian activists, started to conceptualize theoretical tools which would capture the experiences and lived realities of women of color in a more comprehensive manner. As the members of the Combahee River Collective had claimed a few years earlier, "sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race" (Combahee River Collective 1982, 16). They also found it difficult "to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously" thus articulating the "multilayered texture of Black women's lives" (17). However, many of their contemporary feminists of color felt that neither critical race studies nor mainly white feminist criticism could provide an adequate means of self-expression. During the late 1970s and early 1980s a wide corpus of literature – essays, novels, manifestos, articles, poetry – began to emerge in an attempt to express the forms of triple oppression lesbian women of color experienced. A crucial part of this corpus was a journal called *Sinister Wisdom* which Michelle Cliff edited together with Adrienne Rich. This literature, as Linda Garber claims, provided an intertext for theory which has

been too infrequently recognized as the roots of later constructionist queer theorizing (Garber 2001, 205). This textual corpus constitutes the ground Garber calls *identity poetics*.

Identity poetics consists of the pivotal writings which articulate “multiple, simultaneous identity positions and activist politics” both belonging to lesbian feminism and presaging queer theory (Garber 2001, 8). Garber’s ideas are reminiscent of Giovanna Covi’s view that feminist discourse enables forms of literature and philosophy to mix in a way which pushes language to the very limit, “attempting to utter what so far has remained unnamed, but not for this reason non-existent” (Covi 1997, 26). I concur with Covi’s statement that readers of feminist discourse are “invited to discover ‘theory’ in ‘poetry’” and vice versa (Covi 1997, 26). In this section, I will argue that Michelle Cliff’s first novel, *Abeng*, can be read as part of this corpus of identity poetics as the novel challenges the opposition between the theoretical and the rhetorical. Covi urges us to privilege both a fiction and a theory which “seek to bring intellectual and creative discourses together” (Covi 1997, 29). I shall therefore read the novel as a text that seeks to accomplish this task, and in the process provokes identity positions not yet defined in theoretical language. In addition, I read *Abeng* as lesbian text outside the paradigm of more constructivist queer theorizing.

More often than not it is women such as Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Alice Walker, Barbara Smith, or Adrienne Rich who are regarded as the major writers of identity poetics while Cliff remains unnamed. However, *Abeng* articulates, *par excellence*, “multiple, simultaneous identity positions” (Garber 2001, 8). The narration of the novel creates creolized, culturally located formations of sexual identities. As I will demonstrate below, the novel describes located conceptualizations of homosexual subjects varying along the lines of ethnicity and the cultural background. As far as erotic intimacy between women is concerned, sexuality is always connected to particular Jamaican cultural settings and traditional sites, as is the case with the spiritual healer Mma Alli, discussed above. Garber states that “the queer theory/lesbian feminist dichotomy” is often described as “a difference of emphasis: queer theory with sexuality, lesbian feminism on gender” (Garber 2001, 7). In *Abeng*, I suggest, it is both gender and ethnicity which appear re-imagined through lesbian sexuality. Erotic intimacy, as I will demonstrate below, becomes a site of resistance and empowerment for women, while for men it is a site of shame and punishment. Female gendered agency is highlighted in *Abeng*, and thus the narration of the novel emerges as a lesbian feminist discourse rather than queer, if the term is understood according to poststructuralist modes of theorizing.

Garber criticizes queer theoretical views on sexuality for four main reasons. First, she considers queer theorizing to be a constructivist system that has obscured its own genealogy in black feminist discussions. Queer theory, for her, has grown in a “historical vacuum” making the lesbian feminist critiques (of color) to vanish into more universal theorizing (Garber 2001; 176, 183, 187, 201). Second, Garber points out that by universalizing sexual discourse, queer has whitewashed critical statements made by black women and Third World critics while it “writes a queer whiteness over raced queerness” and arises from white Anglo-American experience

(Garber 2001; 177, 190). Third, for Garber, queer does not locate its subject but becomes a totalizing theory. In this problem of politics of positioning I also include Garber's views that queer even disclaims the gendered position of a subject. Garber refers to Bonnie Zimmerman who worries that "lesbian textuality, culture, identity and community" vanish within the claims of generic queerness (Garber 2001; 178, 180, 189). The fourth problem for Garber is queer's theoretical commitment to poststructural philosophy. It is not approachable by an activist readership and its textuality is not accessible to those who do not have academic credentials. Therefore queer theory marginalizes activist and other manifesto-types of writings which have "opened the free-spaces for queer theory" in the first place (Garber 2001, 197). Consequently, I argue that *Abeng* is not a queer, but rather, a lesbian novel. Its strong commitment to cultural and historical situatedness, its aim to re-imagine feminist histories, its sensitivity to racial identities, and the way it belongs to a corpus of fiction providing intertexts to black feminist aesthetics, make *Abeng* identity poetics. I suggest that, as such, it should be read in the context of creolized lesbian feminist aesthetics.

The black feminist movement, starting from the US during the 1970s, addressed mainstream white feminism and countered its ideas about global sisterhoods and the universal woman as having their bases in the middle class Anglo-American experience. In her widely read study, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval envisions a model for oppositional political activity and consciousness drawing on the U.S. third world feminism<sup>261</sup> (Sandoval 2000, 42). She conceptualizes the "differential consciousness" as a strategy for making coalitional politics "with decolonizing movements for emancipation in global affinities and associations" (Sandoval 2000, 42). Sandoval situates her "differential consciousness" in the context of the early eighties feminist discussions of color and names writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and Paula Gunn Allen as its roots (Sandoval 2000, 59). These authors could also be called as writers of *identity poetics* in a sense that in their literature the coalitional forms of early intersectionality and differential feminism were articulated in an essayistic and revolutionary style. In her famous essay, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" (1984), Lorde argues that "we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectations and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 1984, 123). It is this kind of consciousness of old blueprints that also lies behind Cliff's *textual rebellion* in *Abeng*. Aligning myself with scholars such as Sandoval, I also argue that the tradition of black feminist aesthetic remains too often unacknowledged when theorizing contemporary uses of intersectionality. Culturally specific representations of lesbian sexuality in *Abeng* must be contextualized in the corpus of radical feminism of color recognizing racial and class differences in feminist discussions.

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261 Contemporary studies have replaced the term "black feminism" with such terms as 'third world feminism' (Sandoval), 'transnational feminism' (Grewal & Kaplan 1997), 'two-thirds-world feminism' (Mohanty 2003) in order to emphasize intersectional and global nature of feminism of color.

The omniscient narrator in *Abeng* takes the role of situating Caribbean women's experience and forms of expression in history. At the same time, she explains how matrilineal traditions are transferred through times and spaces recognizing the existence of earlier generations of women and their power. In the quotation below the narrator educates the reader about Jamaican forms of women's self-expression:

Many of the dresses were decorated with embroidery or ornamented with appliqué. Both were art-forms of island women – things they learned so easily as girls, they almost did not need to learn them at all. [...] This art – the illumination of plain cloth with orchids and pine-apples and hummingbirds – and this craft – the making of dresses and bonnets and shirts – had been passed through the lines of island women going way back. Far, far back – appliqué had been invented by the Fon of Dahomey, who had been among their ancestors. (A, 59.)

Embroidery becomes a “language” of *island women* which has been re-located to the Caribbean from West African Fon culture. It is the historically located and culturally situated, yet transnational feminist practise which is highlighted in *Abeng*.<sup>262</sup> The feminist genealogies envisioned in *Abeng* become a decolonizing practise which empowers the Caribbean female subject beyond the “master’s tools”. *Abeng* depicts such collective decolonial and emancipatory practises which, according to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, lead to a corollary “rethinking of patriarchal, heterosexual, colonial, racial, and capitalist legacies in the project of feminism” (Mohanty 2003, 8). From the intersectional point of view, it is the rethinking of heteronormativity intertwined with colonial structures which is further challenged in *Abeng*.

Just before *Abeng* was published, two influential articles, “Compulsory Heterosexuality” (1980) by Adrienne Rich and “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” (1977) by Barbara Smith came out. Both Rich and Smith widen the category of “lesbian literature” by including novels depicting close connections between women, women’s communities, and uses of feminist language highlighting strong and rebellious women characters.<sup>263</sup> They both analyze *Sula* (1974) by Toni Morrison as an example of a lesbian novel which rather depicts strong identification between

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<sup>262</sup> The embroidery in *Abeng* reflects the discursive diversity Mae Gwendolyn Henderson is referring to in her widely read study “Speaking in Tongues” (1990). The study analyzes the cultural position of a black woman in-between several subject positions and in an interlocutory dialogue with plural forms of “otherness”. For Henderson the difference and the dialectic of identity “characterize both black women’s subjectivity and black women’s discourse” (pp. 121). (See also Henderson 1990, 118-21.) Embroidery as African Caribbean women’s language illustrates “the heterogeneous social and discursive domains out of which black women write and construct themselves” (pp. 121). In the same study, Henderson appears to articulate the very foundation of intersectionality as she suggests a model which does not only address a subject “en-gendered in the experiencing of race” but also becomes a subject “racialized in the experiencing of gender” providing the interlocutory subjectivity (Henderson 1990, 119). Moreover, the axis of sexuality pluralizes the process of subjectification in *Abeng*: the experiences of race and gender are intertwined with sexuality.

<sup>263</sup> See Smith 1982, e.g. 164-5 & Rich 1987, 24 and 63.



women than their sexual relationships. Rich locates *Sula* within a “lesbian continuum”<sup>264</sup> (Rich 1987, 63), while Smith considers the novel as posing “both lesbian and feminist questions about Black women’s autonomy” (Smith 1982, 165). Feminist theorizations of color in the 1980s, such as Smith’s, included the (lesbian) sexual aspect in its aesthetic manifestations. Lesbian writing could include literature with female relationships providing consolation, support, and possibilities for spiritual and emotional development. In applying Rich’s and Smith’s definitions *Abeng* clearly belongs to the continuum of lesbian literature as it emphasizes the female centered historical and cultural collectivity between girls such as Clare and Zoe.<sup>265</sup>

Both Rich and Smith interpret the relationship between Sula and Nell as a female identified relationship. The girlhood friendship between them can easily be juxtaposed with the one between Clare and Zoe. As mentioned earlier, during their unlucky hog-hunting both girls experience a strong emotional and physical connection as they bathe in a pond in the forest. In this episode, the narration grows tense as they touch each other in open air surrounded by Jamaican nature. The girls feel themselves free and they are able to forget the social boundaries dividing them. Chancy connects this episode in a line of “erotic power between women”, which is highlighted throughout the novel. According to Chancy, at the moment when they are able to free their *bodies* they become emancipated from the *social mechanisms* keeping them apart (Chancy 1997, 150-1). Their bodily emancipation is depicted very similarly to the bodily liberation Mma Alli had taught to Inez before:

Pussy and rass – these were the two words they knew for the space-within-flesh covered now by the strands and curls of hair. Under these patches were the ways into their own bodies. Their fingers could slide through the hair and deep into the pink and purple flesh and touch the corridor through which their babies would emerge and into which men would put their thing. *Right now it belonged to them.* (A, 120, emphasis added.)

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264 For Rich the “lesbian continuum” means “a range [...] of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another women” and expands “it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support” (Rich 1987, 51). However, Rich’s idea of lesbian continuum has been criticized, for example, by Cheshire Calhoun and Bonnie Zimmerman. For both of them the idea looses the idea of “lesbian” under the sign of “woman”, and removes the actual sexual difference of a lesbian. Calhoun claims that in Rich’s writing “the mark of the lesbian ceases to be her sexual outlaw status in heterosexual society and becomes her gender outlaw status in a patriarchal society” (Calhoun 1995, 18). Moreover, Rich’s “continuum-idea” was criticized for its lack of historical specificity and for placing gender over race. See about criticisms: Garber 2001, 134-7.

265 In order to define Sula as a character of a lesbian novel, Barbara Smith outlines “a lesbian” according to New York Radical Lesbians -collective: “She is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society [...] cares to allow her. These needs and actions, over a period of years, bring her into painful conflict with people, situations, the accepted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving [...]. She has not been able to accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society – the female role” (Smith 1982, 168). This also describes the relationship Clare Savage has with her surrounding society.



The narrator eroticizes the sites of Clare's border-crossing: lesbian eroticism becomes the frame within which she overcomes the categories of race, class, and colonial hierarchies dividing her from Zoe.<sup>266</sup>

In her collection of short prose, *Land of Look Behind* (1985), Cliff returns to the story of Clare and Zoe, and describes Zoe's adult years. At a very early age Zoe has tumbled into a violent marriage. She gets beaten by her husband, no longer has front teeth, and suffers from blackouts. According to the female narrator, who refers to Zoe as "my girl", she is "given birth control pills which aggravate her 'condition'" (LLB, 63). Outside female intimacy Zoe no longer has control over her body. While remembering Zoe the female narrator (Clare?) comes to think about *Sula* and experiences a strong connection with the novel:

*Looking Back:* Through the last pages of *Sula*. "And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. 'We was girls together,' she said as though explaining something." It was Zoe, and Zoe alone, I thought of. She snapped into my mind and I remembered no one else (LLB, 63).

Even though Abeng embraces lesbian histories, intimacies between women, and the liberation provided by the lesbian continuum, there is no liberation available for the most oppressed, the dark-skinned, lower class, uneducated, peasant women.<sup>267</sup> While Zoe is destined into a "compulsory heterosexual" marriage and a desperate condition, it is the light-skinned, upper class girl who has the possibility to quest after alternative identities. Even though Clare "wanted them to be the same" (A, 118), it is only her desire to claim Zoe's darkness. Zoe has no possibility to claim "the sameness" with Clare.

Evelyn O'Callaghan applies Rich's ideas of compulsory heterosexuality to Caribbean women's writing. For Rich "compulsory heterosexuality" means examining those political institutions included in heterosexuality which disempower women. Such institutions are systems "by which women have traditionally been controlled – patriarchal motherhood, economic exploitation, the nuclear family", and which are "strengthened by legislation, religious fiat, media imagery, and efforts at censorship" (Rich 1987, 24). In analyzing a wide scale of Caribbean women's literature O'Callaghan finds evidence of problems in relation to sexuality. Women's sexuality is often represented as "shrouded in secrecy and shame" or it is a matter of "casual and unfeeling acquiescence to male pressure" while having negative consequences for the "economic, social and psychological well being" of women (O'Callaghan 1998, 297). O'Callaghan analyzes, among others, the novels of Erna Brodber, Jamaica Kincaid, and Michelle Cliff which all present

266 However, we must pay attention here to the mechanism Siobhan Somerville names as "eroticization of color line" (Somerville 2000, 35). According to Somerville, it is customary within the representations of same-sex desire that the difference in skin-color occupies a place usually reserved for difference in sex. She claims that "the non-sameness of color, language, or culture is a marker of difference in relationships otherwise defined by sameness of gender". (Somerville 2000, 36.) In this light the bathing scene could be set in a dialogue with normative lesbian representations.

267 For an interpretation of the bathing scene in the context of the "tragic mulatta tradition" see Bost 1998, 682. Bost argues that only Clare challenges the borders in the scene. Even though their mutual friendship challenges the conventions of the tragic mulatta, as they hunt wild pigs or shoot bulls, it is Zoe who is set straight (pp. 682).

growing-up as a (hetero)sexual woman as frightening and compulsory. Heterosexual relationships are represented as dysfunctional and unsupportive, whereas the relationships between women, “whether friendships, familial relationships, or other female identified connections”, tend to be supportive and pleasurable (O’Callaghan 1998, 301). Thus, O’Callaghan asks if the problem lies in heterosexuality itself.

O’Callaghan analyzes patriarchal heterosexuality as the only frame of reference for girls in the Caribbean novels she studies. They learn to deny their own needs and to internalize shame over their sensual emotions. The mother-figure in the novels is often the instrument in naturalizing the compulsory heterosexuality (O’Callaghan 1998, 304). Thus female sexuality becomes a site of *melancholic heterosexuality*<sup>268</sup>. Indeed, this is also the case in *Abeng* which O’Callaghan analyzes in psychoanalytical terms. According to O’Callaghan, the narration juxtaposes Clare’s lack of maternal intimacy with her longing for lesbian relationships. Clare’s historical images of Mma Alli, Nanny, and her yearning for Zoe epitomize her yearning for her mother. O’Callaghan utilizes Nancy Chodorow’s arguments to acknowledge that lesbian relationships tend to recreate mother-daughter emotional connections (O’Callaghan 1998, 308).<sup>269</sup> Undeniably, the narrator explains that “in her love for Zoe, Clare knew that there was something of her need for her mother” (A, 131). The absent, distant Kitty embodies compulsory heterosexuality and an unsatisfying partnership.

It is noteworthy that, in Caribbean women’s writing, lesbian sexuality and erotic intimacy between women are themes which might be difficult to discuss locally, and thus, they are often addressed by migrant authors, such as Michelle Cliff or Dionne Brand. O’Callaghan suggests that this is not only due to these writers more tolerant attitudes towards same-sex desire, but also the presence of feminist and lesbian publishing channels (O’Callaghan 1998, 302). The obvious presence of lesbian sexuality in Cliff’s novels illustrates Cliff’s own dual connections between the lesbian feminist circles in the USA and the Caribbean cultural context. It is easy to argue that her cultural distance from Jamaica enables her to write about queer themes. Lesbian invisibility in Caribbean women’s writing is also highlighted by Myriam Chancy. In her analysis of sexual relations and their connection to patriarchy, Chancy refers to Makeda Silvera’s study

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268 Melancholic heterosexuality is widely theorized by Judith Butler in, for example, *Bodies That Matter* (1993). By melancholic heterosexuality she refers to heterosexuality as a mechanism which excludes the possibility of homosexuality and becomes manifested as an only natural form of sexuality – as something which is not chosen but constructed through silencing the other possibilities. Melancholy refers to excluded homosexuality which cannot be mourned in a strictly straight culture. Butler writes: “*heterosexual melancholy*, the melancholy by which a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love” (Butler 1993, 234). Although Butler is talking about men in this quotation heterosexual melancholy is not exclusive to men.

269 The psychoanalytical discussion about lesbian desire has been (and still is) a wide and proliferating topic in the field of feminist theorizing, and therefore, also beyond the frames of this study. However, I would like to mention a discussion between Elizabeth Grosz and Teresa de Lauretis which has been one of the most prominent in the field. See Grosz 1995, 155-171 and de Lauretis 2007, 199-216.

which argues that Jamaican homophobia originates from slavery (Chancy 1997, 159).<sup>270</sup> Marital relationships, families, and children became possible for African Jamaican men and women only in the “post-emancipated colonial order”. Slavery had taken away so much that, after its abolition, non-heterosexual unions “were seen to threaten this newly acquired privilege” (Chancy 1997, 159). Silvera also reports on oral histories, stories and rumors describing, in their harsh language, about the violent measures taken against those women suspected of acting “man-royal” (qtd. in Chancy 1997, 159). The power of these rumors is also represented in *Abeng*. Seemingly small remarks conjure up a culture within which those who are caught up or suspected being homosexuals are subjected to horrendous punishments. This happens in *Abeng* to Clinton, the son of Mad Hannah:

There was a rumour around the place that he was being taunted by some of the other men and boys, and they had left him floundering in the water and gone about their business, while their shouts of “battyman, battyman” echoed off the rocks and across the water of the swimming hole. The swimming hole was now named for Clinton, because he had died in it. (A, 63.)<sup>271</sup>

Drowning is also the fate of Robert, Clare’s uncle. Robert’s story is told to Clare in order to educate her on the consequences of breaking the limits of “natural sexuality”. As we noticed earlier in Mrs. Stevens’ story, the limits of ‘natural sexuality’ exclude homosexuality as well as the sexual relations across the “color-lines”. Robert’s story addresses also the common discourse treating homosexuality as a foreign or alien practice in Jamaica, while it is conceptualized along the lines of Victorian empiricism as a psycho-pathological disease.

The family spoke of him as “funny”, but Clare was not sure what “funny” meant. She knew that Robert had caused some disturbance when *he brought a dark man home* from Montego Bay and introduced him to his mother as “my dearest friend”. [---]. Anyway, didn’t he know that American Negroes were very different from Jamaicans – the dearest friend probably led him into all this foolishness. And the dearest friend was dark – Dark American Negroes were not our kind of people a-tall, a-tall. [---]. Clare became afraid of talking to him. Afraid, [---] that *he would go into a rage or start to cry – if he was “off”, anything was possible*. [---]. She tried to put her uncle and his *illness* from her mind. And finally Robert did what Clare understood many “funny” “queer” “off” people did: He swam too far out into Kingston Harbor and could not swim back. (A, 125 – 6, emphasis added.)

*Abeng* produces histories which have not been told and are not part of legitimate historical knowledge. In this sense, I concur with Chancy who connects Cliff with Audre Lorde and

270 Alison Donnell addresses the silence around same-sex relationships between women in Caribbean literature, but also in the Caribbean legal framework at large. She quotes Tara Atluri who, according to Donnell, “spent a year researching at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies at the University of West Indies” (Donnell 2006, 214), and reported in her paper that “the absence of material dealing specifically with lesbianism in the Caribbean context...the silence is indicative of one of the largest gaps in information I have found” (qtd. in Donnell 2006, 214).

271 In the context of *Abeng*, it is important to realize the “lesbian continuum of obeah women” which revises the idea of obeah as a form of black magic. In addition to Mma Alli and Nanny, Mad Hannah is also an obeah woman. The “public opinion” represented by her fellow villagers connects homosexuality with obeah by stating that “if she not been fool-fool her son would not have been sissy-sissy” (A, 65).

Makeda Silvera as retrievers of buried histories of homosexuality (Chancy 1997, 160). Cliff illustrates the tragedies encountered by the people who are categorized as others.<sup>272</sup>

More often than not, women-identified lesbian traditions, rites, healing, or friendship and the community provide sites of resistance and important moments for identity building while they also “queer” the local Caribbean past. One of the most important genealogical lesbian characters in Cliff’s novels is the Obeah-healer Mma Alli who appears in the story about the plantation owner Judge Savage. Judge is keeping a Carib Indian girl, Inez, as his “sexual slave” in his great plantation house. While Judge is visiting London, Inez goes to see the village healer Mma Alli:

Mma Alli had never lain with a man. The other slaves said she loved only women in that way, but that she was a true sister to the men - the Black men: her brothers. They said that by being with her in bed, women learned all manner of the magic of passion. How to become wet again and again [...] how to touch a woman in her deep-inside and make her womb move within her. She taught many of the women on the plantation about this passion and how to take strength from it. *To keep their bodies their own*, even while they were made subject to whimsical violence. [...].

*With Mma Alli she [Inez] remembered her mother and her people and knew she would return home.* (A, 35 emphasis added).

Timothy S. Chin names Mma Alli “the proto-lesbian character” of Cliff’s novels whose sexuality is reconstructing “the mythology of an Afro-Caribbean past” (Chin 1997, 137). Thus, in *Abeng* Cliff’s narration refutes the idea of homosexuality being something alien and Western, brought to Jamaica alongside colonialism. Rather, it is homophobia which was naturalized during colonialism in unison with heteronormative family values. Mma Alli’s character echoes the history of the female Amazon warriors of West African Dahomey-culture. She challenges the traditional maternal symbols connected to nurturing and heterosexuality as she is described by the narrator as “a strange woman with a right breast that had never grown. She said she was a one-breasted warrior woman and represented a tradition which was older than the one which had enslaved them” (A, 34). Her one-breasted warrior figure is changing the scripts of femininity. The character of Mma Alli, to apply Gayatri Gopinath’s theorizations of diasporic desire, confronts “notions of proper [...] womanhood upon which anticolonial nationalist ideologies depend” (Gopinath 2002, 156). She is not a masculine character but highlights rebellious femininity in her compassion and love for other women.<sup>273</sup>

Cliff’s queered histories contradict the ideas of Frantz Fanon who was not alone in conceptualizing homosexuality as a form of European decadence, brought to African and Caribbean cultures alongside racism. In his well-known study *Peau noir, masques blancs* (1952), Fanon

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272 In *Abeng*, the borders of normality seem to be violently policed: Hannah is locked away in an institution, Mrs. Stevens is punished with exclusion, Clinton and Robert are either killed or driven to suicide, and Clare’s epileptic classmate is expelled. Through these cases Clare starts to realize the rigid boundaries of her social environment. For more on the theme of social borders in *Abeng* see e.g. Agosto 1999, 113-4.

273 For more on the interpretations of Mma Alli’s figure see also Agosto 1999, 66; Chancy 1997, 145-6; Strachan 2002, 248; Thorington Springer 2007, 47-51 and Walker 2001, 174.

insists that no indigenous homosexuality exists in Africa and considers that the productive creation of black male subjectivity must not allow itself to be “symbolically castrated” through any association with homosexuality.<sup>274</sup> Later, Fanonian views strongly affected the post-colonial nationalist rhetoric emphasizing the uprooting of Western and bourgeois conducts such as homosexuality. Paradoxically, it was the Victorian idea of psycho-pathological purity which was recycled in Afrocentric discourse of nationalism.<sup>275</sup> For example Roderick Ferguson interprets that Fanonian thinking aimed to identify the exploitations of colonialism as “disruptions to heteropatriarchy” and inspire “the restoration of that which colonialism, in its castrating maneuvers, had destroyed” (Ferguson 2004, 114).<sup>276</sup> I would like to argue that, on the contrary, Cliff’s fiction and particularly *Abeng* in particular deconstruct the discourse of Afrocentric nationalism by re-imagining the historical existence of homosexuality within Jamaican culture.

In an interview with Meryl Schwartz, Cliff describes how her own internalized homophobia has been transferred as a subtext to her writing (Schwartz 1993, 604).<sup>277</sup> Especially the historical scenes in *Abeng*, describing both the homoerotic and the homophobic events, process this cultural trauma, even though they also create a textual space for Jamaican forms of (homo)sexuality. Lawson Williams addresses the burning self-hatred of Jamaican gays and lesbi-

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274 See Desai 2001, 146-7. See Fanon for the creation of black male subjectivity 1986, 150-81. According to Fanon white people fetishistically direct their forbidden desires into the black body. For example, Fanon states that “the negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual” (Fanon 1986, 156), thus conceptualizing sexuality through racial categories but connecting racism with homosexuality. However, Fanon concedes that there are male transvestites on the island of Martinique. As a Martinican Fanon insists that they have a “normal” sex life. In addition, according to Fanon, “they can take a punch like any ‘he-man’ and they are not impervious to the allures of women – fish and vegetable merchants. In Europe, on the other hand, I have known several Martinicans who became homosexuals, always passive. But this was by no means a neurotic homosexuality: For them it was a means to a livelihood, as pimping for others” (Fanon 1986, 180 n. 44). In this statement, Fanon essentializes the masculinity of black men, even in the context of transvestism or homosexual acts, in contrast to white, neurotic homosexuality.

275 In his study of homophobia in African nationalist discourse in the post-colonial era, William Spurlin pays attention to statements of both Winnie Madikizela Mandela and Robert Mugabe. According to Spurlin, they return repeatedly to the themes of contaminating threads brought upon the new nations by homosexuals. Spurlin interprets that African nationalism has in many ways intertwined with the idealization of masculinity. White colonial power has been seen to emasculate Africa and Africanness, and that black homosexuals are practicing “a form of ideological penetration by whites that further ‘feminizes’ the nation state” (Spurlin 2001, 197; see also pp. 188-96). Recent academic discussion in the field of critical race studies about homosexuality has aimed to deconstruct the myths concerning “non-existence of indigenous homosexuality”. Many scholars have mapped the multicultural sexual practises which were not named as “non-normative” or “homosexual” until the arrival of imperial sexual politics. See e.g. Wekker 2001 and 2006, Desai 2001, Spurlin 2001, Gopinath 2002.

276 For more on Fanon’s emphasis on masculinity and heteropatriarchal premises within cultural revolutionary discourse see Ferguson 2004, 112-16, 123, and 140. Like Spurlin, Ferguson concludes that Black Nationalism needed to re-define the colored man who had been symbolically castrated by the white/colonial order of things. Paradoxically, this re-definition was executed with the ‘weapons’ of empiricist imperialism, namely by controlling sex and sexuality.

277 For more on Jamaican homophobia see also Skelton 1995 and Glave 2000. For more on institutionalized, “state-sponsored” instances of homophobia and homophobic legislation in the Caribbean area, see Donnell 2006, 201-8. Skelton confirms the ideas of other scholars that in Jamaica homosexuality has been considered an illness of white men while Jamaica remains a country of ‘real men’. Moreover she claims that homophobia is more extreme in Jamaica than elsewhere (Skelton 1995, 266-7). In his “Open Letter to People of Jamaica” (2000), Thomas Glave, a Jamaican author and activist, refers to homophobia in Jamaica as a shame which manifests itself as raging violence, even killings (see Glave 2000). Both Chin and Glave refer to dance hall artist Buju Banton as an example of the most raging and visible, yet public and accepted nature of Jamaican homophobia. Banton’s dance hit “Boom Bye Bye” topped the charts in 1992-93 and was extremely popular as well as in radio and clubs. The lyrics of the song explicitly pronounce a death sentence to homosexuals (Glave 2000, 81 and Chin 1997, 127-8). For more on recent discussion of homophobia in Jamaican popular music see Thorington Springer 2007, 54-5 and Skelton 1995 *passim*.

ans which forces them to hide their own sexual identity. According to Lawson this tendency to hide has lead to a suspicion of gay rights activism in Jamaica as well as to the violence against other homosexuals (Lawson 2000, 106-9).<sup>278</sup> In her depictions of Jamaican homophobia, however, Cliff does not treat the borders of normative sexuality as static or insuperable. Rather, the narration in *Abeng* aims to re-imagine counter-stories and provide healing narratives which could collectively respond to the traumatizing histories of homophobia. I argue that *Abeng* not only challenges the Eurocentric versions of history, it also challenges the heteropatriarchy. I agree with Chin who remarks that the novel posits “genealogical precedents for an ‘indigenous’ lesbian/gay subjectivity” (Chin 1997, 137). In this sense, *Abeng* articulates the politics of location, demanded by Garber, while its commitment to situated genealogies does not let lesbians of color to vanish into queer constructivism.

In her above-mentioned article on compulsory heterosexuality, Rich envisions a new terminology which disposes of the patriarchal connotations of the gendered vocabulary. The term ‘lesbian’ for her is not conceptualized in opposition to heterosexual women but it creates a range of deep sensitivities and intimacies between women. Alongside with the term “lesbian continuum” Rich thematizes the term “lesbian existence” which means “the traces and knowledge of women who have made their primary erotic and emotional choices for women” (Rich 1987, 73-4). Moreover, Rich defines the word “erotic” by quoting Lorde for whom it means “the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic” (Rich 1987, 53). Figures such as Nanny, Mma Alli, Clare, and Inez epitomize Rich’s ideas about lesbian existence, yet creolized in Cliff’s fiction. The characters re-write the African Caribbean histories of resistance while signifying the textual commitment to the articulations by lesbian-feminist writers of color. I would like to argue that reparative homosexuality is strongly gendered in *Abeng*. While intimacy between women has been silenced, or only alluded to by depicting melancholic heterosexual relationships in Jamaican fiction, it gets new and rebellious textual sites in *Abeng*. It is homosexuality between men which arouses hatred and causes violent acts of homophobia, as is evidenced in *Abeng*. While homosexual men do not have a supporting network around them, it is the nurturing and spiritual female community which releases the power of the erotic.

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278 Thomas Glave was one of those activists who in 1998 co-founded J-FLAG (Jamaica forum for lesbians, all-sexuals, and gays). The foundation aimed to improve the situation of sexual minorities in Jamaica and to help its members in asylum-seeking from other countries. Thus the history of gay rights organization is short in Jamaica, and even today J-FLAG hides its location in Kingston. However, the organization has caused mixed sentiments even in those people who support its cause. According to Williams, many have been afraid that it draws attention to gay people thus risking their fragile sense of security. Homosexuality in Jamaica is considered a secret which must be kept even among the gay people. In Jamaica, homosexual conduct between men remains a crime punishable up to ten years of imprisonment. See Williams 2000 and J-FLAG (<http://www.jflag.org/>).

## 6.2. Queer *Telephone to Heaven*

In creating an intersectional, queer analysis of *No Telephone to Heaven*, it becomes clear that the idea of the lesbian continuum has taken on more constructivist and postmodern directions. Indeed, I suggest that the term ‘queer continuum’ would be more appropriate in the context of *No Telephone to Heaven* as it highlights non-normative sexual relations as sites of resistance and healing, but destabilizes the centrality of the category of gender. However, in this novel conventionally marginalized characters also emerge as mediators and catalysts in the process of constituting a decolonized identity. In this chapter, I propose that Abeng’s sexualized and gendered borders of identity become bridges in *No Telephone to Heaven*. In my analysis, I will concentrate on Harry/Harriet’s character and his position as ‘a queer bridge’ back home for Clare. As queer studies started from the premises of questioning, challenging, and critiquing the identity categories marked by gender or sexuality, it provides appropriate methodological tools for examining Harry/Harriet’s fluidity beyond normative categorizations. Written in the high years of constructivism, poststructuralism, and in the middle of debates on postmodernism, *No Telephone to Heaven* surmounts the essentialist tones of *Abeng*.

While postcolonial studies has been criticized for overlooking its own heteronormativity, there have also been demands for queer theory to consider its “color-blindness” – the Western and white bias of academic queer theory. It has been said that during the past decade, the queer politics has reached the phase of so called “second generation queer theory” (Boone 2000, 14), that is to say the phase of intersectional queer studies. I agree with the claims that queer cannot universally or globally represent all non-heteronormative identity-constructions. On the contrary, queer has to notice the problematic relationships of social, cultural, ethnic, or class differences, which shape and construct different kinds of sexual practices, various heterosexual, as well as homosexual practices (Ilmonen 2005, 181-5). It is important to ask what kind of racial, ethnic, or gender assumptions queer includes. According to William J. Spurlin, queer needs “comparative, relational, historicized, and contextualized understandings of ‘queer’, engaging localized questions of experience, identity, culture, and history in order to better understand specific processes of domination and subordination” (Spurlin 2001, 185). Queer studies must be challenged to question its own limitations and to consider whether it can represent various kinds of culturally changing forms of non-normative sexualities. It should reflect culturally changing, contextualized queer practices, rather than creating utopias about globalized identities or abilities to migrate from culture to culture, composing imaginary communities.

One of the most discussed characters in Michelle Cliff’s textual corpus is Harry/Harriet, a transgendered man-woman who is also a mixed race Creole. Cliff herself explains in her interview with Opal Palmer Adisa that “I wanted to portray a character who would be the most despised character in Jamaica, and show how heroic he is” (in Adisa 1997, 276). The author also adds that she wanted to have Harry/Harriet go through “what a woman in the [Jamaican] culture endures” (276), especially a peasant or a lower-class woman. Harry/Harriet’s tragedy



is that he has been violently raped by a white soldier as a little boy, but never told anyone about it. Harry/Harriet's controversy is, according to Cliff, that "he really loves his people. He is there helping, yet if they knew what he really was, they would kill him" (Adisa 1997, 276). Together with Clare Harry/Harriet finds a way to blur the boundaries which have been considered absolute and natural defining him as freak, namely those of race, gender, and sexuality. It is Harry/Harriet who understands Clare's sense of emotional fragmentation and helps her to overcome her inner conflicts. Harry/Harriet becomes Clare's only connection to Jamaica while she is in Europe. Harry/Harriet not only supports and consoles her, s/he also offers advice at critical moments. While sick and depressed, Clare hovers between identities, cultures, and homelands, but Harry/Harriet reminds her about the impossibility of living in between spaces. S/he says "We are neither one thing nor the other [---] the time will come for both of us to choose. For we will have to make a choice. [---]. Cyaan live split, not in this world" (NTH, 131). Their friendship, which later blossoms into a love affair, triggers an important process in both their lives.

The split identity has been part of academic discussions about homosexuality within African-American and African-Caribbean communities. There has been a lot of controversy during the recent decades about homosexuality being "the greatest taboo" in black communities. According to Earl Hutchinson, black gays feel that "they are rejected by many blacks and sense that they are only barely tolerated by white gays" (Hutchinson 2001, 5). Furthermore, Gregory Conerly argues that the evident question: "Are you black first or are you queer?" embodies "a central conflict which many African American lesbians, bisexuals, and gays experience dealing with two identities" (Conerly 2001, 7). Gay, Lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered (GLBT) people are accused of denying their black cultural heritage while they experience racism from white gays. Conerly continues that black "lesbigays" are forced to choose or move back and forth between identities and communities which is choosing between positions such as "black identified Afrocentrists" and "gay identified interracialists" (Conerly 2001, 7-12). *No Telephone to Heaven* aims to envision a way beyond such binaries. Both Harry/Harriet and Clare are challenged to find a way towards an intersectional identity combining queer elements with creolized Caribbean layers of their subjectivity. As I noted in the first chapter, Cliff's project is to break the silence around Jamaican non-normative sexualities and to imagine a representation for Caribbean queer, which links (homo)sexuality to the history of resistance and post-colonial activism in the context of Caribbean heritage (Ilmonen 2005, 186). Queer becomes a localized sexual practice, it is no longer foreign or "unnatural" in her novels.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Harry/Harriet becomes a mediating, bridging character whose strangeness is a defining prerequisite to other people's normalness, as the narrator states: "but everyone tolerates him, as if measuring their normalness to his strangeness" (NTH, 21). With Harry/Harriet's aid Clare is able to re-connect herself to Jamaica and her childhood, that is to say, to her own past. Harry/Harriet heals Clare's emotional scars and unites the fragments of her subjectivity, which have seemed to be unfit or inappropriate by the standards of white colo-



nial mythologies. Harry/Harriet becomes Clare's spiritual guide in re-attaching the intersecting categories of her identity. Moreover, Harry/Harriet is not only a healer in a symbolic sense or on a social level, s/he also becomes a nurse after studying both Western medicine and traditional Afro-Caribbean ways of healing. His/her healing profession also helps him to overcome his/her childhood trauma. In a way, Harry/Harriet becomes a metonym of Jamaican Creole culture and its dualisms even though his/her character tries to avoid such an interpretation by stating that

I only suffered what my mother suffered – no more, no less. Not symbol, not allegory, not something in a story of a dialogue by Plato. No, man, I am merely a person who felt the overgrown cock of a big whiteman pierce the asshole of a lickle Black bwai – there it is. That is all there is to it" (NTH, 130).

Although Cliff tries to avoid presenting national allegories, it is Harry/Harriet who embodies several genders, races, cultures, and ways of knowledge.<sup>279</sup> Harry/Harriet is "not just sun, but sun and moon" (NTH, 128). In the novel, Harry/Harriet is juxtaposed with Mawu-Lisa, a powerful god in West African Fon culture. Mawu-Lisa is a genderless or bi-gendered character who does not represent the physical difference between men and women. Mawu-Lisa is both the sun and the moon, or power and wisdom combined to represent a synthesis of many dualities common to Western culture. Thus Mawu-Lisa also resists the essentialist nature of biologically defined gender.<sup>280</sup> To quote the novel, "one old woman, one who kenned Harriet's history, called her Mawu-Lisa, moon and sun, female-male deity of some of their ancestors" (NTH, 171).

As a traditional healer with Mawu-Lisa's trickster-like characteristics, Harry/Harriet becomes an agent in a continuum of Jamaican lesbian/queer healers and helpers alongside with Mma Alli and Nanny.<sup>281</sup> When Harry/Harriet introduces Clare to the Guerrilla troops, they choose to identify with the female-identified rebellion and anti-colonial action. The textual rebellion in Cliff's novels is not only feminist, but also queered, thereby subverting the traditionally masculinist bias of revolutionary discourse. Harry/Harriet is no longer a boy raped by a white man and a symbol of a wounded nation but a trope representing creolized queer identification, local resistance, and the matrilineal tradition – "a fairy guerrilla" (NTH, 130). Through her reference to Mawu-Lisa, Cliff avoids just "fine-tuning the system of additional identities", to quote Judith Raiskin (1995, 191), she finds a true African Jamaican place for Harry/Harriet.

I argue that Harry/Harriet embodies the ambivalence of Jamaica; on the one hand as a place of fear and violence, but on the other, as a home and as a site of love:

279 For more on Harry/Harriet's symbolic nature see also Elia 2000, 353.

280 For more on the dual-sexed trickster, see Gates 1988, 23 & 30 and Renk 1999, 133-39. Renk refers to all tricksters problematizing the gender binaries as "tricksters of Sun and Moon". This kind of tricksters can be found, according to Renk, for example in the writings of Michelle Cliff and Paule Marshall (133).

281 For more on queer tricksters in Cliff's novels see Ilmonen 2005b.

None of her people downtown let her on if they knew a male organ swung gently under her bleached and starched skirt. Or that white powder on her brown face hid a five o'clock shadow. Had they suspected, what would they have been reduced to? For her people, but a very few, did not suffer freaks gladly – unless the freaks become characters, entertainment. Mad, unclean diversions.

Had they known about Harriet, they would have indulged in elaborate name-calling, possibly stoning, in the end harrying her to the harbor – perhaps.

And still she was able to love them. How was that? (NTH, 171.)

Textually, Harry/Harriet is absolutely queer in so far as the term refers to instability of binaries, ambiguities in signification, obscured identity categorizations, or intangible positionings. Harry/Harriet challenges the oppositional sexual identities and blurs the conventional dualisms signifying openness of subjectivities. However, for Clare, s/he symbolizes a site of resistance and an imagined homeland, where the binarities that have fragmented Clare's identity no longer hold true. With Harry/Harriet Clare finds her sense of rootedness anew and connects to Jamaican nature and the homeland very concretely. It is both physical and spiritual love with Harry/Harriet which Clare considers as the beginning for herself:

This was but the beginning. Soon they would be covered with mango juice, salt water, and the spicy oil of the meat. Resting from riding the breakers, warmed by their feast and the sun, they lay side by side under a sky thrilling in its brightness. Touching gently, kissing, tongues entwined, coming to, laughing. (NTH, 130.)

This sensual and affective connection with each other and Jamaican nature follows the discussions Clare and Harriet have about the politics, history, and slavery of their homeland. As much as the land in Cliff's novels is connected to the maternal and matrilineal, it is also the site of female identified erotic. Their laughing reverses O'Callaghan's idea about the absence of joy, sensuality and pleasure in female sexuality in the work of Caribbean prose writers (O'Callaghan 1998, 298). Kitty may be doomed to her heterosexual melancholy in *Abeng*, but erotic joy is integral to the representations of queered relationships in *No Telephone to Heaven*.<sup>282</sup> Their "lesbian" love making, as Harry/Harriet has called herself a woman at that time, becomes the site of their healing. Their bodies are depicted as beautiful and erotic, overcoming the racist Medical tradition categorizing the colored body as ugly or unaesthetic. Clare is finally able to accept her biracial body while Harry/Harriet learns to appreciate her intergendered body. The narrator explains that Clare feels herself "womanly [---] in her ability to feel for him" (NTH, 128), and she is ready to vow that "'Harry, you make me want to love you.' Clare had never said that to anyone before this" (NTH, 130). In the Clare Savage novels, I argue, the sense of the Caribbean home becomes queered. The female-centred tradition of resistance and the re-written, de-colonized history emerge as being intertwined with an insurgence of the demands of

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282 For more on absence of erotic joy in Caribbean women's writing see Donnell 2006, 192-205.

heteropatriarchy. It is Harry/Harriet who becomes the mediator in Clare's identity process – a queer telephone to heaven.<sup>283</sup>

Joseph Boone and Dennis Altman have both discussed the new postcolonial or multi-cultural challenges of queer theory. They ask whether we can discuss sex/gender structures independently from larger cultural, social or political ones.<sup>284</sup> I think that through an intersectional queer perspective, we need to talk about the various forms of gay or lesbian, culturally changing forms of sexuality. We need to discuss how gender, sexuality, and ethnic or the socio-cultural background are intertwined. It is important to discuss whether homosexuality can be understood as a Western category which was imported to colonies to signify various forms of sexual practices. Do we preserve or maintain colonialism when we use the term homosexuality to describe different kinds of cultural/sexual practices? However, as Altman discerningly reminds us, “there is a constant danger of romanticizing ‘primitive’ homosexuality” (Altman 2001, 22). The point is not to nostalgize after more “authentic” forms of sexuality, but to examine, as Altman puts it, “how do new forms of sexual identity interact with the traditional scripts of sex/gender order” (32). This interaction is exactly what Cliff's narration does when queering Caribbean cultural practices.

I suggest that we cannot separate questions of sexuality and (post)colonialism. We need to think, how the homosexual/heterosexual –dualism was produced and constructed, and especially, globalized. And importantly, does this globalization of homosexual/heterosexual –opposition also normalize family-centered heterosexuality by marginalizing indigenous sexualities after labeling them homosexual. As Jarrod Hayes concludes, defining various localized sexual practices as homosexual or heterosexual belongs to the operations of a colonialist discourse. Open sexuality, for example, was a proof of other's “Otherness”, something which should be un-learned in order to support Western forms of family politics (Hayes 2001, 83-7). In Caribbean literature, the politics establishing foreign/imperial family structure and institutionalizing strange domestic morals, causes communal chaos, even tragedies, as depicted for example by George Lamming in his novel *In the Castle of My Skin*. It could be argued that the colonial power globalized heterosexuality as a norm and imposed it on the societies where ‘the order of sexuality’ might have been founded on utterly different terms. It can actually be claimed that colonialism and homophobia are interrelated phenomena (see Ilmonen 2005, 191).

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283 Cliff's localized queer depictions deconstruct the binary which Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan refer to as “the tradition-modern split” (Grewal & Kaplan 2001, 669). This split, according to Grewal and Kaplan, bothers many transnational studies of sexuality which are still based on the idea that “the global feminist is one who has free choice over her body and a complete and intact rather than a fragmented or surgically altered body, while the traditional female subject of patriarchy is forcibly altered, fragmented alienated from her innate sexuality, and deprived of choices of agency” (Grewal & Kaplan 2001, 669-70). *No Telephone to Heaven* imagines culturally situated and localized forms of sexual agency for Clare and Harry/Harriet, they do not acquire the true nature of their sexual identities in Western metropolis, which according to Grewal and Kaplan has been the “international human rights arena” and a “state of freedom” in work based on the tradition-modern split (670). However, with her depiction of Jamaican homophobia and the dangers Harry/Harriet is subjected to Cliff avoids sanctifying Jamaica solely as a site of oppositional consciousness proliferating practises of resistance.

284 See Boone “Go West. An Introduction” (2000), and Altman “Rupture or Continuity. The Internationalization of Gay Identities” (2001, especially page 36).

As several scholars of intersectionality argue, the positions of class, “race”, gender and sexuality are inseparable, and one has to be aware of other identity positions, when only one of them is discussed. Therefore, I think Boone raises very important issues in his article “Go West” (2000) as he reminds us to think about the conditions of queer. He asks “who is excluded from the access to the term queer, and who chooses to join its ranks? Is queer theory a product of American consciousness that is largely irrelevant outside the U.S., or worse, a concept that, like modern ‘homosexuality’ in its exportation abroad, stands to erase or subsume the sexual particularities of other cultures?” (Boone 2001, 12). Both *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* conceive homosexuality as something other than the opposite of heterosexuality, or alien to African Caribbean culture. Sexuality cannot be separated from the other categories of identity as the homosexual *praxis* they depict is already articulated through and in terms of the Caribbean cultural heritage and history in a fundamental way. For instance, Cliff’s renaming of Harry/Harriet as ‘Mawu-Lisa’ rather than referring to him/her as ‘transsexual’ illustrates her determination to use localized language to describe her specifically Jamaican character. However, through her literary queerings of Jamaican culture, Cliff’s migrant American locus becomes clear. Her writings simultaneously participate in Euro-American movements of queer literature.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Harry/Harriet signifies the re-inscriptions of bodily normatives. His/her subversive body twists or queers the gendered imperatives of the heteronormative gender binary. Harry/Harriet’s body becomes the site of “hyperbolic gender performativity”, to use the conceptualization of Judith Butler. Butler uses “drag” as an allegorization of the “subversive resignification of norms” (Butler 1993, 237) rendering visible the “imitative structure of gender itself” (Butler 1999, 175).<sup>285</sup> Butler suggests that drag also reveals the distinctiveness of those aspects of gendered experience, which “are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence” (Butler 1999, 175). In Harry/Harriet’s drag gender imitation, the regulatory fiction draws from the regimes of colonialism as well as those of heteronormativity:

Harry/Harriet puts on a bikini-bra stretched across his hairy, delicately mounted chest, panties cradling his cock and balls – and starts to dance to “Hey, Jude”. People laugh but nobody takes Harry/Harriet to heart. “You won’t laugh so when I am appearing in London with the Royal Ballet and *the Queen come fe see me*.” Laughs and more laughs. “I shall be at Cable Hut tomorrow, dancing with the sun behind me.” Pause. “Come if you want some pussy.”

“Lord, Harry, where you get pussy?”

“You would be surprised, massa.” (NTH, 21 emphasis added.)

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285 Butler also states that “what drag exposes, however, is the ‘normal’ constitution of gender presentation in which the gender performed is in many ways constituted by a set of disavowed attachment or identifications that constitute a different domain of the ‘unperformable’” (Butler 1993, 235-6).

In this scene, young Harry/Harriet gives a drag performance at a party s/he and Clare attend. Ironically, and not uncommonly in postcolonial reality, the queen of England is needed as a symbol of legitimization. Harry/Harriet has learned to act the “camp-gay” role in order to be left alone. A few years later Clare says to Harry/Harriet:

“Harry, how come you talk this way when at the party you were going on about dancing in England before the queen?”

“Oh, man, girlfriend, is nuh what dem expect from me? Nuh jus’ give dem what dem expect? Battyman trash”. (NTH, 127).

The narrator points out that it is only in the domain of a very narrow showman-performance that an inappropriate gender can be accepted.

Through Harry/Harriet’s character the narration of *No Telephone to Heaven* displaces the normative, ‘natural’, iteration of gender. The embodied identity is defined neither by biology, nor genetics. In Clare’s case, it is racial identity which remains fluid, changing in each context. In this sense, the anti-biological discourse of *No Telephone to Heaven* could be placed in dialogue with Butlerian ideas of biologically defined gender as “a great mistake for feminists” “only because that leads to a reduction of women to their reproductive function—a position with intensely homophobic consequences” as Judith Butler explains in an interview with Liz Kotz (Butler & Kotz 1995, 270). In the novel, Harry/Harriet is collecting money for a sex-change operation. When Clare finally returns to Jamaica from Europe, she meets Harry/Harriet in the hospital. Clare has been hospitalized after a severe infection resulting from a miscarriage which, as the depressed Clare learns, has also made her infertile. Harry/Harriet provides an example for her that a biological impediment or feature does not take away her womanhood:

“Harry?”

“Harriet, now, girlfriend ...finally.”

“Then you have done it?”

“No, man. Cyaan afford it. Maybe when de revolution come...but choice is mine, man, is made. Harriet live and Harry be no more.” [---]. “But, you know, darling, castration ain’t de main t’ing...not a-tall, a-tall.” (NTH, 168.)<sup>286</sup>

Harry/Harriet takes the power of self-definition to herself and chooses to be a woman. Moreover, she helps Clare in her struggle between racial borders. Clare chooses to identify with her black history refusing the positions of “albino gorilla” or “sterile mule” which have been

286 There are many views concerning Clare’s miscarriage in Cliff-research. Not everybody see it as a constructivist representation of gender performativity. For example, Ramchandran Sethuraman interprets it as a symbol of the Jamaican colonized land. Therefore, for Sethuraman Clare’s sterility after miscarriage becomes a part of Cliff’s heteroglot narrative which “does not tell a tale of narrow individual angst, with all its attendant psychologising and interiority” but rather “it constitutes a polycentric world based on the plural social discourse of the communitas” (Sethuraman 1997, 274). For Wendy Walters, the miscarriage represents a national allegory: “Clare’s infected womb is mirrored by the womb of Jamaica, the motherland”, the miscarriage thus symbolize the problems of Jamaican society (Walters 1998, 228).

given to her. In Cliff's novels, I suggest, the "legal fiction of a binary gender" (Cream 1995, 36) is blurred.<sup>287</sup> Clare, without a fertile womb, and Harriet, who has a penis, envision a womanhood beyond biology. The dominant status of biology within popular gender-discourse becomes contested in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

In an interview with Meryl Schwartz, Cliff herself has stated that Harry/Harriet is a lesbian character in the novel because "he's a man who wants to be a woman and he loves women" (Schwartz 1993, 601). With this subversive statement, Cliff highlights the inappropriateness of the biological body and the binary strategies as signifiers of gender and sexuality. For Angella KM Gourdine, for example, Harry/Harriet combines or hybridizes the binarism between straight and lesbian desires (Gourdine 2002, 92). In a sense, Harry/Harriet is a male lesbian character as envisioned by Jacqueline Zita in her provocative article "Male Lesbian and the Postmodernist Body" (1998). In a larger context of lesbian feminist theorizing Zita poses more postmodern arguments destabilizing the continuum between male sex, masculine gender, and desire for women. Zita aims to examine "lesbian identity as a construction defined by normative positioning" whereas "the male lesbian creates a stress on established social categories" (Zita 1998, 87). Postmodern re-thinking, for Zita, means de-centering the idea of sexuality as a "truth about the body" which for her is a modernist idea, similar to those organizing bodies "on either side of the great homo/hetero divide" (Zita 1998, 88). The use of the male lesbian body for Zita seems to be a deconstructive strategy posed to modernist sex/gender/sexuality paradigms. I argue that Zita's constructivist idea of the body corresponds to the ideas represented in *No Telephone to Heaven*. The constructivist bodily paradigms are also articulated by Julia Cream who states that "there is no way that a body can escape its social and cultural setting" and that "the body is thus seen as possessing no pure, uncoded state, outside the realm of culture" (Cream 1995, 33). Zita and Cream analyze the cultural codings of gendered and sexed bodies by examining the ambivalence created by those bodies which do not fit, or are out of place, in our social and cultural realities. These kinds of perspectives render visible the organizing power of cultural social bodily (and binary) codings, which I think, is the textual function of characters such as Harry/Harriet in Cliff's novels.

*No Telephone to Heaven* echoes the postmodern debates of the late 80s and early 90s between feminist and queer theories. Harry/Harriet destabilizes the idea of stable identity positions by distancing a material aspect of gender from culturally constituted sexuality.<sup>288</sup> While

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287 Julia Cream notes that medical technology maintains a myth of gender binary. Hormonal treatments, surgical sex alterations, or operations provided for intersexual children, for example, epitomize the gendered system which does not accept bodily ambivalence (Cream 1995, 36). Both characters, Clare and Harry/Harriet question such myths. For more on Cliff's abandonment of biological determinism see also Raiskin 1995, pp. 188-93. As Raiskin points out, "it is significant that neither Clare nor Harriet makes a physical change at the end [---]. By their own choices each has challenged the boundary of racial and sexual classifications" (Raiskin 1995, 191).

288 For more on the feminist and queer debates see McLaughlin et al. 2006. The radical argumentation of the early queer theorists, such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Gayle Rubin, included the insistence of separating gender from sexuality in order to examine the constitution of both, homo- and hetero-sexuality. These ideas were confronted by many lesbian feminists who invested their political struggle in the gendered and material aspects of sexual identities (see McLaughlin et al. 2006, 10).

Harriet has a biological male body, she epitomizes lesbian sexuality. It seems to be Harry/Harriet's investments in ethnic, cultural, racial, and creolized categorizations of identity which intersect with his/her sexuality. The erotic nature of Clare's and Harry/Harriet's relationship is described in terms of Caribbean tastes, scents, and views, for example, when the narrator describes them as being covered with mango juice, or the coconut water dribbling over them while they kiss under the bright sun, with their skin salty from swimming in the sea (NTH, 130). Harry/Harriet stands in the intersection of bodily binaries and helps others, like Clare, who have been wounded by these binaries. In the context of Shani Mootoo's fiction, Alison Donnell analyses a relationship between two transgendered characters in terms of radicality noting that "it is anatomically normative but socially queer" (Donnell 2006, 241). This is true also in the case of Clare and Harry/Harriet. They, to use Donnell's words, help us "to think about desire and sexual relations outside the discourse of the state" (Donnell 2006, 241). Harry/Harriet's character turns borders into bridges by deconstructing the normalized, material boundaries which have been claimed to be natural and thus immutable.

Harry/Harriet challenges the idea of a complete identity as s/he does not stop in re-defining his/her identifications. Her announcement "Harriet live and Harry be no more" is not her final statement on his/her ongoing citations of identity categories. When s/he joins the guerrilla group with Clare, s/he becomes masculinized anew. Harriet takes up a khaki-uniform stolen from an American soldier:

They wore the jackets in a strict rotation, with only the medical officer, formerly a nurse at Kingston Hospital, owning one to herself. Her name was Harriet; in the jacket she became Thorpe. (NTH, 7.)

The guerrilla scene has also aroused a lot discussion among Cliff-scholars. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham interprets that the identical uniforms of guerrillas constitute a similar "double-voiced" symbol as the abeng-horn. On the one hand the 'goal' of wearing khaki is "like empire's, to achieve likeness, but this time in the interest of forging an alliance and unity [...] among a group of people widely separated by skin color and social class" (Needham 2000, 100). On the other hand they are used for revolutionary purposes and to protect the guerrillas. Like abeng, they can be "deployed for domination or resistance" (ibid). I suggest that khaki illustrates a Foucauldian system of discourses, within which power and resistance are vectors of the same textual structure.<sup>289</sup> Harry/Harriet becomes a character, like Zita's male lesbian, who reveals the contingency of "utterly constructed and arbitrary, but encumbering" nature of modernist and

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<sup>289</sup> I consider Needham's interpretation more relevant than that of Paula Morgan's connecting khaki-uniforms only to a machinery of totalitarian militarism which, according to her, is envisioned in *No Telephone to Heaven* (Morgan 2003, 164). Morgan does not consider the possibility of subversive re-citations of signs. Some of Cliff's critics have claimed that she risks romanticizing violence or reproducing stereotypes. Noraida Agosto, for one, argues that "although the rotation of the jackets suggests equality, it may be argued that Cliff silences the lower class characters by denying them names and voice [...]. While Clare and Harry/Harriet are individualized, the others are perceived as an amorphous mass [...]" (Agosto 1999, 123), for whom "the guns were not strangers" (NTH, 17). For Agosto, Cliff risks repeating the stereotype "associating poverty and crime" (Agosto 1999, 124).



binary reflections of the body (Zita 1998, 107). I argue that in *No Telephone to Heaven* Harry/Harriet's body is a sign which becomes iteratively re-signified within the culturally situated assemblages of bodily discourses. In other words, it is an ambivalent sign which does not constitute a stable ground for embodied categorization of identity, such as race, gender, or sexuality.

To conclude, I argue that while Cliff's *Clare Savage* –novels creolize the queer, that is to say imagine localized sexual identities, they also queer the Creole by positioning the queer characters as traditional healers and spiritual guides. Cliff's novels re-write the local past from a queer point of view. This perspective transfers the queer from the domain of *teoria* to a domain of *praxis*. David L. Eng et al. envision numerous ways in which the second generation of queer studies is able to map the role of sexuality within anti-imperialist and antiracist projects. They demand intersectionalizing and provincializing of the queer studies in order to examine the ways in which “racialized heteropatriarchy has been universalized as a Western discourse of (sexual) development, as a project of modernity and modernization, as a colonial and civilizing mission, as an index of political and social advancement, and as a story of human liberty and freedom” (Eng et al. 2005, 8). I suggest that Cliff's visionary novels aimed to “provincialize” the queer as early as the eighties, since they imagine the localized sexual praxis rather than constitute more universal queer/homosexual identities.

Finally, I quote Judith Raiskin who claims that Cliff forces the reader to scrutinize “the system of representation we have inherited” as her characters step “beyond the biological determinism of racial and sexual classifications” (Raiskin 1994b, 167). Cliff's narration counters, on the one hand, heteronormativity and its ‘accepted’ forms of sexuality while, on the other hand, it dismantles the colonialist power-knowledge apparatus concerning hierarchical racial categorizations. Moreover, her texts highlight Caribbean queer practises as sites of resistance and rebellion. Harry/Harriet turns into a guerrilla-trickster and a healer providing love and support for Clare struggling in-between racial borders. The healing narrative in *No Telephone to Heaven* becomes queered, but as queer it is situated in the Caribbean cultural context. Queer in the novel is not something which celebrates universalizing constructions but always appears intertwined with ethnicity, historical and cultural background, class, race, and gender. Biologism appears as myth of pedagogical value, to use Bhabha's terms, but it is contested through performative articulations of ambivalent identifications.

### 6.3. *Free Enterprise*: Intersections of Race, Class and Sexuality

*Free Enterprise* considers the themes of sex and sexuality in terms of contingency, passing, and intersectionality. Sexual identities can be constructed only through other modalities of identity, namely ethnicity, social and class position, historical space and cultural locality. *Free Enterprise* depicts several ways of belonging to sexual minorities, for example, by demonstrating that relationships between white women differ from those between black women. In this chapter, my



aim is to analyze the ways in which *Free Enterprise* examines relations of politics and power in the structuring of sexual identities. The questions of cultural situatedness, transnationality, and historical moment organize the ways in which the intersecting axes of ethnicity, sexuality, race, or class emerge and intertwine. I will outline an intersectional queer perspective of the novel. Moreover, I suggest that in her third, and most radical, novel Cliff moves beyond the conventional meanings of positionality, as her queered visions are transferred into transnational and diasporic spaces of resistance and subalternity in general. The novel highlights what Gayatri Gopinath has called a “queer diasporic positionality” (Gopinath 2002, 150) contesting both domains, the domain of nationality, and the domain of gender and sexual matrix constituting accepted citizenship.

Even though queer transnationality is a relatively recent way of conceptualizing queer studies, Gopinath introduced her queered understanding of diasporic positionality as early as 2002. For Gopinath, the concept of “queer diasporic positionality” is three-fold: First, it situates “the formation of sexual subjectivity within transnational flow of culture, capital, bodies, desire, and labor” (Gopinath 2002, 150). Second, it “contests the logic that situates the term ‘queer’ and ‘diaspora’ as dependent on the originality and authenticity of ‘heterosexuality’ and ‘nation’” (150). And third, it disrupts both the dominant homonormative categories of gay and lesbian in the Euro-American context and “marks a different economy of desire that escapes legibility” within normative contexts elsewhere (151). In *Free Enterprise*, it is the transnational rebellion and diasporic resistance which frame queered identifications. The problems of creolizing the queer is turned into queered transnational solidarities beyond the logic of the nation. However, the novel examines queered identifications, not as universalist categorizations, but as intersectional and multiply located. Queer only emerges through the co-constituted axes of race, ethnicity, and class.

The focus of current intersectional queer studies is not the theorization of sexuality alone, it also examines the ways it is already intertwined with other social institutions. Roderick A. Ferguson applies intersectional, transnational queer theory in his study *Aberrations in Black. Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (2004). Ferguson analyzes how several kinds of social issues, sociological studies, and even economical theories are imbued with the (hetero)sexualized matrix. For example, he is interested in linkages between historical materialism and modern civilization as a racialized scene of heteronormativity. As Ferguson explains, Marx himself naturalized heteropatriarchy by posing “capital as the social threat to heteropatriarchal relations” which meant that both “liberal reform and proletarian revolution sought to recover heteropatriarchal integrity” (Ferguson 2004, 10).<sup>290</sup> Moreover, Ferguson examines the role of ethnicity

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<sup>290</sup> For more on Ferguson’s views on Marx see Ferguson 2004, 1–24. Ferguson points out that Marx’ economical theories are implicitly based on ideas such as heterosexuality and patriarchy but they remain unexplored as natural, obvious institutions. Indeed they are, in Barthesian terms, myths which are transferred from history to nature, and “the historical intention has been given a natural justification” (Barthes 2000, 142). In Ferguson’s study, none of the aforementioned concepts – patriarchy, heterosexuality, whiteness, nor Western cultural standing – are taken for granted. Thus he calls his method as “queer of color critique”. In this study, I use the term intersectional queer studies to describe similar problematics in conjunction with recent postcolonial/feminist scholarly work.

and race within different sociological paradigms while analyzing their interconnectedness with understandings of sexuality. This kind of intersectional critique provides a vital reading tool for *Free Enterprise* thematizing sexuality through other social categories.<sup>291</sup>

In addition to the main story line describing Annie's and Mary Ellen's rebellious acts, *Free Enterprise* contains a story of unfulfilled love between two upper class cousins, Alice and Clover Hooper. During the US Civil war, Clover, who is a photographer, travels around with Alice documenting the events of war. The passionate love between these women, however, falls apart because of the demands of their social role. As Antonia MacDonald-Smythe contends, they "cannot perform outside of their interpellation" (2001, 165), they are imprisoned by the white womanhood.<sup>292</sup> As Clover ponders on her role as a privileged, educated, and wealthy woman, she is painfully aware that certain social arrangements pertain to her. She feels unable to fulfil her role:

Accommodations would be made. She might even be kept at home. In a room where she would be forced to approximate a rounded, female figure. Maternal, feminine. Soft. She was not and it frightened her.

She was too angular, everyone had noticed. Her breasts were boyish. Her hips unconvincing. And she was possessed of artistic pretensions. *No woman she.* (FE, 158–9, emphasis added.)

The womanhood Clover thinks about is the particular kind of upper class, Victorian, white femininity of her era. Both her racial and her class standing affect her views of gender. As Ruth Frankenberg has argued, race shapes white women's lives, too (Frankenberg 1999, 447). Frankenberg points out that whiteness is always a socially constructed position, which "refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to the unfolding relations of domination" (Frankenberg 1999, 451). It is whiteness that matters in Clover's life.

Alice also feels restricted by her status, but unlike Clover she cannot articulate, what bothers her. Instead, she identifies herself and Clover with Emma Bovary in Flaubert's novel:

My God, it wasn't at all infidelity rewarded! Poor bitch indeed. Unwilling to be a woman, really, unable to be a mother and wife. A book considered poison for the young, unmarried female, as Clover was – a spinster with artistic pretensions to boot. (FE, 93.)

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291 Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan use the term "transnational studies of sexuality" to describe this kind of intersectional perspective. They also apply the term "diasporic studies of sexuality" which takes into account not only the global economical and family political, but also transnational and neocolonial perspectives on the studies of sexuality. According to Grewal and Kaplan they "want to argue that the study of sexuality in a transnational frame must be detached from psychoanalysis as a primary method in order to resist the universalization of the Western body as sexual difference" (Grewal & Kaplan 2001, 667-8).

292 Even though *Free Enterprise* depicts Alice and Clover as prisoners of their social status, it also recognizes the power they are capable of wielding because of the status. MacDonald-Smythe notes that one example of this power is their meeting with Scheherezade, a slave woman, in an alley. MacDonald-Smythe considers this meeting to be "voyeuristic" as Alice and Clover romanticize the assumed freedom of this woman. As they want to photograph the woman they, according MacDonald-Smythe, "never move beyond spectatorship" (MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 164). Their gaze reduces Scheherezade into a position of "other".

Both Alice and Clover have tragic fates. Clover commits suicide by drinking the liquids she uses to develop her photographs, and Alice retires from the world into her bedroom in the attic.<sup>293</sup> In her bedroom, Alice reads fiction and thus exchanges ‘reality’ for ‘fiction’. I agree with MacDonald-Smythe who suggests that this “reading Alice” is her potentially lesbian self (MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 160). It is Alice’s reading self that is able to liberate her mind and to imagine herself into places and situations symbolizing her lesbian identity:

The book of Sapphic fragments took her back. To a country house on a hill outside Lyon, where she played chess with an old woman dressed in gray silk, [---], the old woman warning Alice whenever her queen was endangered: “*À la reine, ma chère!*” For the two woman playing chess, the king paled beside the queen.

After the game, the old woman presented her with the book, a silvered cover, like the old woman’s silver dress. The cover fell open to a frontispiece where an artist had portrayed the Lesbian poet in *empire* style, curls piled high, breasts trapped by Napoleonic restraint (FE, 83–4).

Alice’s only friend in the attic room is her pet bat, Atthis<sup>294</sup>. Alice is able to talk freely only to Atthis, and finally she starts to regard the bat as a substitute for Clover.

*Dearest Atthis* ..... she might have been speaking to Clover, of her longing for the time they felt most alive. “Real” was the word Clover used. “For the first time, I am real.” (FE, 84.)

Alice is unable to name her yearning despite of the Sapphic references; it is replaced with the word “Real”.

In *Free Enterprise*, Alice’s Atthis becomes connected to the rhetoric of blood and vampirism. Alice’s maid sees Atthis as a disgusting blood-sucking vampire, which reflects the shame and aversion their social context poses to lesbianism. Alice, however, defends this symbol of her beloved Clover by stating that “Not this one, Molly. No vampire she” (FE, 96). The trope of the vampire has been widely discussed in the context of writing by women of color. For example, Caroline Rody considers it to be a metaphor which problematizes the natural, essential role of reproduction. A vampire acts as a counter-discourse to biological essentialism. (Rody 2001, 97).<sup>295</sup> In her article, “Tracking the Vampire”, Sue Ellen Case uses the

293 In feminist studies of literature the trope of a woman retained in an attic has been conventionally interpreted as a metaphor of mental unbalance. The metaphor often includes the idea of denying one’s true identity or the distortion of one’s identity process. See more for the “mad woman in the attic” see Gilbert and Gubar 1984. In this scene, Cliff clearly comments the widely known literary tradition.

294 The name “Atthis” opens up a net of connotations. First of all, Atthis is one of the beloved companions of Sappho on the island of Lesbos. Sappho has dedicated many poems to Atthis, some of the fragments even beginning with the words “Dearest Atthis”. Second, Atthis is a daughter of Cranaus, from whom Attica, a region in Greece, was believed to have derived its name. Third, according to classic mythology Atthis was a lover of the goddess Cybele. There are many myths concerning Atthis and Cybele, but probably the best known of them tells that jealous Cybele took the reason out of Atthis, and he castrated himself. Later, in the Roman period, followers of Cybele took the example of Atthis, and ritually castrated themselves after which they dressed themselves in female clothing. And fourth, Atthis refers to a genus of hummingbirds which are common in the Caribbean area.

295 Rody analyzes the connections of homosexuality and vampiric characters in the context of women’s writing of color, particularly in her analysis of *The Gilda Stories* (1991) by Jewelle Gomez. In this novel homosexuality between women of color is thematized with the trope of vampire (see Rody 2001, 78-88).

trope of a vampire in the context of same sex desire. According to Case, vampirism is associated to non-life-giving forms of sexuality, refusing reproduction (Case 1997, 383), which is an apt descriptor of Alice and Clover. Case claims that a heterosexual world gazes at a lesbian as it would gaze at a vampire, because they are both linked to the themes of unnatural desire, death, contamination, sickness, and blood.<sup>296</sup> According to Case the anti-AIDS-rhetoric and modern racism provided the discourse on contaminating the healthy blood. Such discourse invented the vampire position which was imposed on un-naturally desiring queers (Case 1997, 385-6).<sup>297</sup> A lesbian has been seen metaphorically as an unnatural seductress and a blood-sucker, simultaneously tempting and disgusting. After Clover's death, a statue "modeled from the life, *both male and female*, whose eyes are shrouded" (FE, 179), is put on her grave.<sup>298</sup> Her queerness is acknowledged only posthumously.

Even though both Alice and Clover are paralyzed by the white class status (the cause of Clover's death is metaphorically stated to be a "paralysis of the heart"), *Free Enterprise* also envisions counter-stories to these paralyzed lesbian identities. Alice proposes the option of homesteading to Clover, as she has read many women have actually taken this path:

She'd read of female couples, the most daring of pairs, dashing in their wide-brimmed hats, friends or cousins, travelling with the wagon trains. Women homesteading in the middle of nowhere, say prairie in Nebraska, no beginning and no end in sight, building from the ground up. Planting a cornfield. Raising a milk cow. Gathering eggs and slaughtering hogs. Shooting the eyes out of a rattlesnake. (FE, 97.)

With the counter-story of all-female homesteading the narrator integrates lesbian women into the genre of the frontier narratives of US literary history. While the Western frontier region has traditionally been considered a site of freedom, a place of finding one's true self, and liberty to build one's own destiny, it has also been a fundamentally masculine horizon.<sup>299</sup> The frontier romance hides female sexual experiences, and also the abuse of women. The narrator documents the flip-side of the masculine frontier romance by demanding a monument for those prostitutes who served in the saloons:

296 It must be noted that these same discourses are also examined in the Carville leper colony sections in *Free Enterprise*, and Myriam Chancy connects the sections directly to AIDS-discussion in her analysis (Chancy 1997, 173-4). Moreover, the leper colony is associated with the aforementioned themes such as isolation, sickness, and racism which are also present in the dominant discourses surrounding gays and lesbians of color. I find this kind of juxtaposition typical of Cliff's texts: the rejection sexual minorities face in the dominant culture is paralleled with the marginalization those considered 'sick' are subjected to among 'healthy' people. This topic is a central theme in many of her short stories, but also for example in the case of Uncle Robert in *Abeng*.

297 In her study, Case examines the status of a lesbian in a society which, according to her is reminiscent of a vampire, lusting after straight blood. In her tropics, Case also connects the discourses of race and racism to the 'purity' of the blood. In analyzing several vampire movies, she finds out that the male vampires in older films are more often currently female ones, sexualized and seducing lesbians. Case suggests that the vampiric traits have appeared in homosexualized popular representations through AIDS-discussions in the eighties. See Case 1997, passim.

298 This statue is one of the historical details in *Free Enterprise*. The statue, the Adams Memorial, was sculpted by August Saint-Gaudens and it is often referred to as his masterpiece. The bronze monument was commissioned to Marian's grave by the grief-stricken Henry Adams after his wife's suicide. The Adams Memorial stands today in the Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington D.C.

299 For more on the frontier ideology see Slotkin 1986, specifically pp. 40-1. However, it must be noted, as Slotkin does, the frontier was not a true site of freedom. It seldom meant freedom to other people than white men pp. 26-8. In this sense, Cliff's lesbian homesteading imagery is yet another form of her textual rebellion.

All these gals deserve a monument. To their enterprising ways. To commemorate the diaphragms they crafted from eelskin (learned from their Indian sisters?), to the douches they brewed from alum, pearlash, white oak bark, red rose leaves, nut galls, the bittertasting teas expelling the child with ease.

HERE'S TO THE WOMEN WHO SERVICED THE MEN WHO OPENED THE FRONTIER. (FE 102, original capitals.)

Thus, we can read, as Agosto notes, Cliff's representations of women's bodies "as a type of historical document" (Agosto 1999, 8). *Free Enterprise* queers the generic frontier romance by rendering visible the historical existence of female couples but also women's sexual 'enterprises'. The homesteading lesbians or frontier prostitutes occupy a similar 'outlaw' or 'borderland' position outside the dominant culture as a female pirate couple the narrator later refers to. Together, the pirate couple raises, in a Jamaican jail, the child who later saves Captain Parson's life (FE, 111). These outlaw women are not restricted by the same social norms that paralyze Alice and Clover. It is the category of class which intersects with whiteness and sexuality in this case which challenges readers to question univocal identifications.

The co-constitutive dialectic between class and sexuality is not only an issue concerning white racial positions, it also interacts with the gendered blackness in *Free Enterprise*. The narrator refers to the rumors that were spread about Mary Ellen around San Francisco. At times she is considered a rich, bourgeois entrepreneur, and as such a chaste widower. However, in other kinds of stories she is labelled a brothel keeper and voodoo queen. The narration identifies the violent power of categorising discourse and the intersectional nature of these categories:

"Mary Ellen Pleasant?"

"Wasn't she a voodoo queen?" [---].

"Didn't she run a whorehouse for white businessmen in San Francisco?" [---].

"Didn't she have a witch mark on her forehead?" [---].

"One blue eye and one brown eye?"

"Wasn't she ebony?"

"Yellow?"

"Wasn't she so pale you'd never know?" [---].

"Didn't she have penis?" (FE, 18.)

Mary Ellen becomes a *spoken subject*. The reader is challenged to realize how the categorizing power discourse cannot accept ambivalence: Mary Ellen's ambivalent skin-color becomes transformed into an ambivalent sexuality, even gender. The discourse of categorical Empiricism pathologizes the sexual and gendered ambivalence of those subjects it defined as unwanted, racially ambivalent, or a threat.

Antonia MacDonald-Smythe claims that the relationship between Alice and Clover is mirrored in the relationship between Annie and Mary Ellen. As the narration of *Free Enterprise* explores the themes of transnational solidarity between women, as well as female-identified coalitions in different kinds of social and racial contexts, MacDonald-Smythe claims, it also "explores the ways in which the term 'lesbian' is nuanced by the particularities of its racial and social context, thereby releasing 'lesbian' from the sexual moorings" (MacDonald-Smythe

2001, 160). The relationship between Annie and Mary Ellen is based on an intimate friendship, commitment to shared values, and common resistance. While Annie's and Mary Ellen's characters highlight the ideas of the lesbian continuum articulated by Rich, they also reflect the idea of Zami-love, as defined by Audre Lorde meaning deep intimacy between women of color, or macocotte-intimacy discussed by Antonia MacDonald-Smythe.<sup>300</sup> Lorde has politicized the meaning of erotic desire between women. For her "the power of erotic" means "an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (Lorde 1997, 279). In this sense the commitment between Annie and Mary Ellen is highlighted when Mary Ellen describes their relationship with the word "lover" when she writes letters to Annie saying that "you are like an old lover to me" (FE, 133). Annie and Mary Ellen are not limited by the white upper-class standards of femininity which control the relationship of Clover and Alice. As racialized subjects, Annie and Mary Ellen are left outside the 'cult of a true womanhood' and thus they are able to draw power (of erotic) to their shared battle from their friendship. I concur with MacDonald-Smythe who argues that, seen in this light, the narrator of *Free Enterprise* sets herself into a dialogue with Hazel Carby who considers that the exclusion of black women from the ideology of true womanhood also rescued their bodies from restricting norms (Carby 1987, 32 and MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 161).

As Gloria Wekker notes, Western terms such as "homo", "hetero", or "bi" are often inadequate to describe the various forms of erotics of non-Western cultures. She emphasizes that sexuality cannot be analyzed separately from social structure and cultural values in general. Mere biological facts are not sufficient if the intersections between ethnic and erotic are highlighted.<sup>301</sup> The narrator of *Free Enterprise* does not use the word 'lesbian' to describe sexual

300 Probably the best known piece of Audre Lorde's writing is her only novel *Zami, the New Spelling of My Name* published in 1982. The term Zami refers to Creole Patois variant of *les amis*, meaning deep and supportive friendships shared by women. The novel is a sort of 'coming-of-age' narrative within which its protagonist Audrey finds an expression of her female identified identity as zami. Zami-identity includes the awareness of Caribbean culture and mythology, as opposed to 'lesbian' identity referring to Western culture. Macocotte refers to "unusually intense same-sex friendship between adolescent girls which often include sexual experimentation" (qtd. in Donnell 2006, 215). Even though Annie and Mary Ellen are not adolescent girls, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of vernacular discourses regarding same-sex relationship beyond Western binarisms.

301 See Wekker 2001, 155-6. There are also problems in Wekker's argumentation. Wekker claims to study homosexuality from a constructivist point of view, and she considers the cultural and the social factors as constituents of different kinds of homosexualities in different contexts. Wekker separates two forms of female homosexuality between women of color, one which she calls black lesbianism and the other called Mati play, or Mati-ism. While black lesbianism is bound to Western discourses of female homosexuality, Mati-ism is a more Afrocentric form of desire between women. **Mati-ism is described with the terms of inclusiveness, familiarity, collectivity, and acceptance** whereas black lesbianism is defined by exclusiveness, individuality, and a certain class status. I think that with this binary setting Wekker is bound to colonial dualism (see Wekker 2001, 149 & 159-61). It is impossible to define the essence of Afrocentric love between women. I refer to concepts such as Womanism or zami-love in order to highlight the culturally varying network of several kinds of homosexual practices, not to define an authentic core of sexuality between women of color. Using these local terms, I seek to practice what Katie King calls a "contest over metalanguage" (2002, 35). Wekker's insistence over terms illustrates the politics included in identity terms: as King states, it is a political act to use terms such as "lesbian" or "feminist" as global terms, however, it is also a political act to refuse them as global terms (see King 2002, 34-5). In Cliff's intersectional logic, it is the refusal which must be acknowledged: there is no sexuality in some kind of pure form independent from other categories of identity.

identities and practises. References to Sappho are made only in connection with Alice Hooper, a white woman whereas Annie is called a woman “whose nature took her to the other side” (FE, 181). I suggest that the unwillingness of the narrator to use Western categories to label sexual identities such as ‘lesbian’ or ‘homosexual’ refers to what Patti Duncan names as “uses of silence” (Duncan 2001). According to Duncan, the Western “coming-out –discourse” may involve moving away from cultural traditions, and spaces, for people of color (Duncan 2001, 30). In other words, ‘coming out’ has a corollary effect which forces a person to accept the discursive subject position of an ‘articulate queer’ including the values of Western gay and lesbian movement. Duncan quotes Sagri Dhairyam who warns us not to establish a binary between a ‘silent closeted native’ and an ‘outspoken white gay’ (see Duncan 2001, 30). In fact, Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan state that visibility and legibility of sexual differences are often predicated in globalizing discourses on “a developmental narrative in which a premodern, prepolitical, non-Euro-American queerness must consciously assume the burden of representing itself to itself and others as gay in order to attain political consciousness, subjectivity and global modernity” (Cruz-Malavé & Manalansan 2002, 5-6).<sup>302</sup>

In *Free Enterprise*, the narrator’s unwillingness to use terms referring to “sexual-deviances” represents her fight over words. Cliff’s narrative technique, I suggest, seeks the mobility of categorization and searches after such third terms that deconstruct sexual binaries. Annie is connected to the “protolesbian” tradition of Cliff’s novels in other ways, for example, as she names herself after a woman warrior very similar to Mma Alli and Nanny, a woman who draws “the stares of men as well as women” (FE, 26). In addition to Annie’s sexual identity, her racial and gendered identifications are also blurred. Her racial positions change according to her gendered positions. Annie can pass as male and female, as well as black and white in the turmoil of John Brown’s raid. She only wears men’s clothing and uses lotions to darken her skin. As Annie’s character illustrates, *Free Enterprise* blurs the conventional understandings of identity positions and changes them into a terrain of fluidity.

*Free Enterprise* opens up histories of intersections, mobilities and passings while its subject positions are not connected to stable categories to the reader. Annie is able to change herself from a light-skinned middle-class Creole girl into a warrior of color. She vacillates between genders, ethnicities, and sexualities while Alice and Clover Hooper also move between masculine and feminine subject positions during the war. Mary Ellen also dresses herself as a male in the whirlwind of John Brown’s raid and even moves into a white male position as she

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302 The “fight over words” and the identifications that local/global sexual categories predicate is an on-going debate in the fields of intersectional studies of sexuality and queer of color –critique. I agree with Robert Strongman who demands the denaturalization of gay and lesbian identities and contextualization of gender and sexual orientation identities within a specific cultural context (Strongman 2002, 188). For more on the discussions of localizing the queer see for example Strongman 2002, King 2002, Eng & al. 2005, Ilmonen 2005, McLaughlin et al. 2006, Erel & al. 2008. For more on vernacular vocabulary with which to name particularly Caribbean sexual practices see Donnell 2006, 214-19. Donnell astutely argues that “the emergence of a vernacular vocabulary with which to name and explore culturally-specific sexual identities and practices will continue to enrich the understanding and acknowledgement of diverse and complex Caribbean sexualities” (Donnell 2006, 215).



leaves a note signed “Gentleman” at one crime scene in order to hide her connection to the crime. When Mary Ellen escapes after an unsuccessful raid she encounters three white boys who threaten her life. In self-defence, Mary Ellen kills the boys. She leaves a note at the scene saying “These were some mean niggers. You owe me a favour” signed “Gentleman” (FE, 140). In this way, she discursively claims a white male position, and no-one doubts the chain of events. In her discussion of this episode, Agosto argues that “her note indicates her awareness that identity, like that of a white gentleman, can be constructed by linguistic representation” (Agosto 1999, 130). While assuming this linguistic identity Mary Ellen is also able to appropriate it strategically for her own purposes. Her intersectional position becomes even more complex when it is reflected through the category of class. Mary Ellen slips between being a rich hotel-owner defending capitalism and a poor revolutionary guerrilla in the novel. Moreover, in the case of the Jewish woman, Rachel, the fluidities of identity are considered from the perspective of sickness and health. Because of her leprosy, she becomes racialized in Carville and therefore identifies with the other people of color. I would like to argue that it is fluidity and contingency which mark the identity politics of *Free Enterprise*.

The fluidity of identity politics in *Free Enterprise* is often articulated through *passing*, which becomes a central strategy of rebellion. According to Noraida Agosto, there are two kinds of passings in the novel, on the one hand there is the old colonialist strategy of “passing up” which, for example, is desired by Annie’s middle-class family. On the other hand, the “passing down” represented in the novel seems to be a revolutionary practise of the novel disturbing the white mythologies and normative values (Agosto 1999, 127). Both Annie and Mary Ellen utilize several kinds disguise during the Raid. In *Free Enterprise* passing appears to be a conscious tactic which challenges its older representation in *Mulatta* literature. In older *Mulatta* literature, passing was often used as a strategy for hiding, or gaining respect within white culture. For example, Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, the author criticized by Cliff’s narrator, uses passing in such a way. “Passing down” as an ‘object’ or an ‘other’ revolts against the white mythologies which define appropriate subject positions. The disguises used in the novel, skin-darkeners and cross-dressing, highlight the performative and constructed nature of identity categories.<sup>303</sup> These themes become particularly clear when Annie tells Rachel about Mary Ellen:

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303 The theme of “passing down” was present already in Cliff’s earlier works. For example the poem called “Artificial Skin” in *Land of Look Behind* emphasizes the idea that a skin-color is an artificial category, signifying the amount of melatonin. The color of one’s skin does not refer to authenticity or origins but it becomes an interchangeable signifier. The speaker of the poem yearns for a darker skin as she says “I need it for my well-being” (LLB, 98). Suzanne Bost interprets that this kind of discourse, typical of Cliff’s writings, questions indeed the values of the older *Mulatta*-genre (Bost 1998, 681). For more on Cliff’s contestations of *Mulatta* literature see also MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 165-7.



Mary Ellen passed herself off as a blacksmith. She was truly something. She dressed as a house servant in San Francisco, came to the convention in Chatham dressed as a jockey, went South as a blacksmith, finally escaped as a middle-aged woman of African descent, *which she was*. Disguise was something she knew well. We all did. It was *practically my birthright*; you know that. Disguise. Masks. Never give out what you're thinking. [---]. The tribal story-teller taking on the face of each whose tale he tells. Disguise. How to pass through the nets. (FE, 194 emphasis added.)

Paradoxically, within the nexus of passings and cross-dressings, the best disguise for Mary Ellen is her own identity. As a female entrepreneur of color, her position is only barely intelligible to the people of her own time. In Annie's case, her Creole ethnicity is already loaded with the history of passing. However, in *Free Enterprise* passing is not a submissive or passive strategy of survival but rather a conscious tactic used for resistance.

In *Free Enterprise*, as in *No Telephone to Heaven*, expressions of gender vary far beyond the biological gender dichotomy. By participating in the Raid dressed as men, Annie and Mary Ellen dismantle the role of biological sex as a defining signifier. Biological femininity does not refer to passivity as women repeatedly occupy masculine social roles, particularly those of resistance and rebellion. The situations of conflict open spaces for women to free themselves from their conventional roles in *Free Enterprise*. For example, Alice and Clover are able to travel and live together during the Civil war. The freedom created by a conflict is further highlighted in the queer story of Dr. Walker, one of the many minor characters in the novel. Mary Walker is a white female doctor who Alice calls as "the strangest creature" (FE, 172). Walker, who passes for male, participates in the war as a surgeon at the front specializing in amputations. She alters male bodies. Unlike Alice, Clover is not confused by Dr. Walker, but instead identifies herself with her:

I wonder that you refer to Dr. Walker as a strange creature? Why is that, do you think? Is it because her hands are not trained for women's work? Neither are mine. Am I then strange to you? (FE, 173.)

It is easy to argue that Cliff's depictions of battles and wars are always a means of blurring gendered boundaries, but they are also recognitions of women's war-time endeavors which are often left unacknowledged. It is estimated that almost 400 cross-dressed women participated in the US Civil War, Mary Walker was one of them (Agosto 1999, 180 n. 13).<sup>304</sup> *Free Enterprise* gives historical credit to those women ignored by American history.

While *Free Enterprise* addresses the less frequently discussed topic of female transvestism, it also focuses on a topic even fewer academic studies has dealt with: interracial homosexual relationships. These kinds of relationships are often considered hierarchical couplings

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304 In *Free Enterprise* there are several descriptions of female to male cross-dressing which was highly condemned at the time depicted in the novel. As Agosto interprets, it was "an assault upon the very essence" of patriarchy "not only because it allows women to appropriate male privileges but because it challenges the structures by undoing gender categories" (Agosto 1999, 127). Radically enough, almost all focal female characters in Cliff's novels are able to move into masculine positions – Clare, Harry/Harriet, Nanny, Mary Ellen, Annie, Alice, Clover, Mma Alli, Miss Mattie, Kitty, and Zoe.

within which one person holds the dominant (white) position while the other one is exoticized. Cliff's representation, however, leaves out the white subject as it concentrates on the relationship between two males, one of whom is a native Carib and the other one a free black man. This relationship takes place in Montego Bay where Mary Ellen's father, Captain Parsons, arrives in his ship. Parsons encounters the Carib in a tavern. At the same time, however, the Red Coats, British soldiers, rush in. They end up killing the Carib and imprisoning Parsons. The scene metaphorizes the imperialist chain of events as the native man does not survive and the black man is clapped into irons.

The pictures on the red-gold skin moved as the Carib gestured. Their black eyes met, and they touched hands. And into this intimacy the Red Coats strolled, casually storming the room, interrupting two men falling into love, and before Captain Parsons could say good-bye, the moving pictures were still, and he was clapped into irons. (FE, 118.)

He pictured the Carib blood running into the rum on the tavern floor. Just like that. Just like that a man with pictures on his skin had his heart explode. Captain Parsons could not weep for him in front of these men. (FE, 115.)

Radically enough, this metonymy of Imperialism is presented through homosexuality. Hema Chari has argued that it is particularly the imperialist discourse which establishes the stereotype of a Western man. This stereotype is boosted with connotations with virility and strength, while it is reinforced with discursive epithets of effemination, such as weakness, impotency, and homosexuality which are associated with colonized masculinities. Chari continues that colonialist masculinity implies sexual hypermasculinity intertwined with naturalized heterosexuality and homophobia (Chari 2001, 78-92).<sup>305</sup> The tragic story of Captain Parsons and his Carib lover illustrates the violent and oppressive nature of the colonialist hypermasculinity of the Red Coats, while the reader is urged to scrutinize several prejudices concerning "othered" masculinities.

*Free Enterprise* does not tire of representing queer diasporic positionalities describing the assemblage of co-constitutive categories of ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality in a constant flux. A woman is a sexually feeling, experiencing subject whose identity becomes processed multi-dimensionally. The intersectionality of these categories is not so much about constructing identities as it is about illustrating the mobility of transnational dynamics within which identifications emerge. That is to say, my intersectional approach assumes, to draw on Erel et al., the impossibility of "fully disentangle different relations of power and that discourses and oppressive practises around important social divisions [...] do not only play together, but are mutually constitutive of each other" (Erel et al. 2008, 269). This kind of approach highlighting the mutuality of the processes constituting categories also reveals the problem of intersectionality using frequently the "categories of identity" as its starting point. Antje Hornscheidt

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305 In the light of Chari's analysis, it could be argued that the tavern scene in fact reproduces the colonialist discourse by queering both men of color. I would argue, nonetheless, that the scene rather deconstructs than reproduces this discourse by rendering it visible and thus vulnerable to critique.

has analyzed the limitations of categorizations used in intersectional approaches. According to Horscheidt they imply “monolithic and clear cut categories and discriminations/inequality/oppression/dominance” (Horscheidt 2009, 35). Horscheidt goes further to state that, in intersectional studies, there is a danger that categories become “naturalized to some degree and authorized as a central analytical tool” (Horscheidt 2009, 41). None of the categories in *Free Enterprise* are stable or remain uncontested. For example Annie’s position varies throughout the novel. Her gender and sexuality become interpreted intersectionally through ethnicity. At the very end of the novel, Annie finally reveals to Mary Ellen what truly happened to her after the unsuccessful raid. She confesses that all the black women who got caught were killed. Annie, however, passed as a man and was sent to hard labor alongside other black men. Afterwards, when her female sex was discovered, the white guards forced her fellow prisoners to rape her. The rape scene is accidentally witnessed by a white woman, who is horrified as she, unlike the guards, regards Annie as a white woman. The lady shouts: “She is no more nigger than I am. What is she?” (FE, 208). As a white woman, Annie would have been protected as vulnerable and fragile. As a black woman she would have been killed or been regarded only for sexual pleasures, whereas, as a black man she is fit for hard labor.<sup>306</sup>

In *Free Enterprise*, the women are agents of revolution. The novel provides a transnational, gendered, and sexual discourse for resistance displacing the traditional patriarchal/national norms embedded in revolutionary textuality. Thus, the revolutionary discourse of *Free Enterprise* emerges in a dialogue with the tradition of both literary corpuses, on the one hand with US black cultural nationalism and, on the other hand, with African Caribbean nationalism. Rebelious acts in *Free Enterprise* become gendered and queered challenging the hetero-patriarchal discourses of revolution represented for example in *Guerrillas* (1975) by V.S. Naipaul.<sup>307</sup> I argue that *Free Enterprise* does not only re-write feminist history, it also interferes in the problems of cultural nationalist rhetoric through intersectional, queer of color –critique. Revolution is no longer based on a Fanonian discourse about imperialism as the castration of black men, but represents an intricate network of hybrid and intersectional mobilities of power relations – namely transnational solidarities. I suggest that intersectional queer discourse of revolution in *Free Enterprise* becomes transnational rather than postcolonial in its concerns of global movements of ideas, representations, and epistemologies. However, these transnational movements

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306 Annie’s character is an intertextual reference to a novel called *Winona* (1902) by Pauline Hopkins. Both Annie and Winona use skin-darkeners, wear men’s clothing and pass as men while the passing is intertwined with John Brown’s Raid. However, while Winona’s passing serves romantic purposes, Annie utilizes her passing for resistance. Once again Cliff’s novel challenges the “mulatta tradition” by allowing Annie to involve herself with a radical rebellion and to claim masculine identifications. This was not possible for tragic mulatta figures in the early twentieth century representations. For more on the interpretations of *Winona* see Somerville 2000, especially pp. 100-5, 110.

307 According to Roderick Ferguson both the Caribbean based and the US based Black Nationalist movements had, in fact, shared affinities with its antagonists in the 1960s: “those affinities had to do with revolutionary nationalism’s investments in heteropatriarchy” (Ferguson 2004, 113). Ferguson claims that these movements gave birth to a “new Black middle class” which, while criticizing racism by whites was itself intertwined with white system values, mainly in its insistence of racialized and universalist discourses concerning normative gender roles and sexual purity. Within this discourse, women were once again pathologized as reproducers (Ferguson 2004, 145-6 and 136-7).

are also systems imbued with dynamics of inequality. As the narrator emphasizes through the aforementioned painting “Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – a Typhoon Coming on” by Turner, transnationality itself is not an unquestioned utopia.

In all of her novels, Cliff questions the separateness of categories such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class by depicting the intersectional intertwinings, mobilities, and anti-essential processes as the cases of Clare, Harry/Harriet, and Annie elucidate. In short, Cliff’s narration imagines historical space for the queer agency. Moreover, her novels highlight how sexuality cannot be thematized without taking other cultural signifiers into account. For Cliff, sexuality does not form an axis of identity politics as such. Identities emerge in the nexus of transnational movements and are marked by relations of power and solidarity: they are processed through lived experiences and multiple localities including traces of oppressions and resistances. Moreover, counter-discourses such as myths, rites, oral histories, and healing narratives are interwoven together in Cliff’s novels with internalized ideological apparatuses such as colonialism and sexism. It is a dialogue between oppressive and healing discourses within which the creolized, (post)colonial queer subject gains agency.

To conclude I would like to argue that the problematics of sexuality changes from *Abeng* to *Free Enterprise* in several ways. While *Abeng*, on the one hand, could be connected to a more essentialist phase of lesbian feminism of color, *No Telephone to Heaven* presents a more postmodern and constructivist ethos. *Free Enterprise*, on the other hand highlights intersectionalities and transnational interactions. Characters such as Mma Alli and Nanny illustrate the special commitments *Abeng* makes to Jamaican history; it is the spirit of the warrior women which must be retrieved. The novel re-writes the past of colonial women while it voices the buried traumas, such as the homophobia, in order to heal the wounded history of Jamaican women. Thus, *Abeng* echoes the ideas of Black Feminist Aesthetics and the identity political tendencies of its writing time. *No Telephone to Heaven*, for one, leaps to the other direction in its emphasis on constructions, discourses, performativities, and postmodern. In the novel, skin-color is neither white nor black, gender neither male nor female, sexuality neither straight nor gay. The traditional markers of identity are proven to be contingent, interchangeable, constructed, and textually varying according to contexts. *No Telephone to Heaven* moves from the politics of location towards diasporic (dis)placements, movements and migrations. The novel seems to deny the possibility of stable identities: the *Bildung* does not come to an end, and every arrival seems to be a new departure. There are no essences but the constant re-iterations of ‘identity’ positions. Therefore I think that *No Telephone to Heaven* reflects the constructivist tendencies and the rise of postmodernism of the late eighties. *Free Enterprise*, instead, migrates away from the Caribbean into a more transnational space. It is not so much involved, vertically, in the depth of decolonial history as it shares horizontal solidarities transnationally with other oppressed. Positions of privilege and subalternity vary along the lines of passings and the intersecting categories of identity. The diasporic conceptualizations of locations and nationalities are highlighted also in terms of sexuality.

## 7. Conclusion: History, Identity, and Ethics

Our Caribbean journey through Michelle Cliff's novels has come to an end. The journey has taken a long route through Caribbean history towards an intersectional sense of transnational identity processes. I hope to have demonstrated that the intersectional identities in Cliff's novels are always situated and constituted, which means that identities need to be both historically and culturally processed in her novels. I began my scholarly journey by quoting Cliff's self-proclaimed mission of creating "a complete Caribbean woman" (LLB, 14). Subsequently, I am ready to conclude that no such "completeness" exists in her novels: they represent identities in constant, intersectional flux. Furthermore, identities require the corollary processes of re-thinking history, cultural space, gender, and sexuality in Cliff's novels. Thus, I suggest that feminist history, the gendered sense of past, emerge as the sites of a textual home for Cliff's protagonists. In other words, the sense of the past enables her Caribbean female subjects to find and to embrace their situated sensibilities of the world, and thus forms the textual site of identity in her novels. The textual home Cliff is writing for Caribbean colonized women is a discursive place, where their multiple ways of identification are possible.

Cliff's female subjects share the rebellious spirit with the historical women with whom they identify. Love between these women includes a common sense of oppression, the ethos of rebelliousness, and the will to remember the matrilineal tradition. Therefore, I argued that the re-written history in Cliff's novels is woman-identified, feminist, and queer. In the first chapter, I posed a question concerning the textual homes Cliff writes for Caribbean women, and there I claimed that 'home' is grounded on situated history, which enables the feminist agency and queered affections. The rebellious textuality Cliff creates in her novels enables queerness to become a site of postcolonial agency as it provides a perspective from which colonized history can be re-conceptualized. **Metaphorically, the home is a version of history which displaces neither the stories and traditions nor the emotions and affiliations of Caribbean women.**

I have also emphasized the meaning of the re-narrated past that appears in Michelle Cliff's novels. Indeed, the power of postcolonial literature lies in its potential to re-tell such a past, whether historical or fictional, that slides too easily into the background. Cliff's re-narrated version of the Caribbean and the trans-Atlantic past builds a foundation for the subaltern self-identification. History is needed in the process of healing the wounded memory of the colonized, the women, and the sexual or ethnic minorities. However, I suggest that Cliff not only creates historical and discursive space for her characters, but also for her readers. First, by creating manifold historical narratives she enables the new kinds of introspective contingencies for those who identify with her protagonists. Second, she widens the historical horizon of the reader who did not know the narratives, or who thought she was not connected to that history. By providing glossaries and footnotes, she also salutes those kinds of readers who are willing to learn and to take a Caribbean journey, like me. This is one of the ethical quests of Cliff's novels.

In the first chapter, I mentioned, that one of my goals was to consider how Cliff's novels undermine and dismantle the Eurocentric ways of conceptualizing history and how they re-claim a Caribbean past. In Chapter Two, I outlined the various historical approaches found in Cliff's novels: the archaeological approach in *Abeng*, the diasporic approach in *No Telephone to Heaven*, and the transnational approach in *Free Enterprise*. In Chapter Three, I showed that Cliff's novels deconstruct the legitimized, Eurocentric mythos of modernity by pointing out the significance of transnational Caribbean interconnections within the very mythos. By challenging the grand-narratives of the West – namely the modernity and the empiricism – Cliff's textuality pluralizes and 'transnationalizes' the context for Western readers. This is the second ethical quest of Cliff's novels. Indeed, her narratives have the subversive potential to undermine accepted Western epistemologies concerning the era of Caribbean colonization. Her novels question both Western and modern modes of self-validation by placing the mythos behind the very validation under scrutiny. Thus, the axioms of modernity become ethically de-legitimized in the novels of Michelle Cliff.

Cliff does not merely confine herself to the deconstruction of colonialist versions of history in her novels, she also re-writes new stories, which in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* are more Caribbean ones and in *Free Enterprise* more transnational ones. The novels decolonize history through emancipatory intertexts, the use of patois, transliterated folklore, and remembering the Caribbean forms of traditional heritage, thus creating liberatory poetics for those who have been marginalized. In Chapters Four and Five I argued that Cliff's liberatory poetics becomes history for her subaltern subjects replacing the colonial modes of structuring the past. I proposed that the liberatory poetics is constituted out of the little pieces of stories, tales, legends, and maternal memories in Cliff's novels. Like "our tapestry", Annie describes in *Free Enterprise*, which exists only "piece by piece", buried with those who have passed on, or forgotten and misplaced, "lining jewellery boxes, gathering dust in attics, used as shoeshine rags" (FE, 192), Cliff's literary ethos is to collect some of these pieces and to weave a new

tapestry. Thus, the journeys Cliff's protagonists have to take, are the journeys towards a historical understanding of the self. The subaltern subjects of her novels need to discover their own history in order to process their identities. So, the major theme of her novels is undoubtedly the interconnectedness of history and identity. Cliff's re-written history reaches, not only the level of the grand-narratives, but also, the level of an individual. The processual self of her novels seems to be as much temporal as it is spatial, or culturally located, like Clare, who cannot live "on borrowed time" (NTH, 193), and the guerrillas, who swing their hoes in the name of their grandmothers (NTH, 10).

Cliff's novels form a collage of elements, whether local myths, re-written canonical texts, depictions of rebellious acts, or citations from other literature, which highlight the manifold and the dialectic nature of her counter-narratives. Cliff's ethics of what I have called 'textual rebellion' present history as a field of knowledges that do not constitute a static opposition for hegemonic history, but rather, becomes the hybrid tapestry of stories. Her motif of textual rebellion is perhaps best illustrated with the idea I presented in the Chapter Four, that Clare is both Caliban and Miranda: first, the reader is directed to recognize Clare's dual, creolized identity in-between the cultural borders. Second, it exemplifies Clare's ambivalent gender and sexual identity. Third, it uses a canonical, Shakespearean intertext, which epitomizes the all-encompassing nature of Western textual tradition, yet fourth, proves that also this tradition can be re-written and made hybrid. Fifth, the example points out, how literature is always built on previous texts, and how the ways of structuring reality are often based on literary tropes. Finally, sixth, it demonstrates that the Caribbean is already inscribed in the colonial tradition by pinpointing the island setting of Shakespeare's play. Therefore, I would like to argue, that Cliff's textual rebellion does not renew the binary logic of colonial history: it is not simply an oppositional version, but rather constitutes as a multi-faceted disturbance for hegemonic axioms. In fact, if I should define Cliff's textual rebellion, I would rather answer to the question 'what it does' than 'what it is'. Her narratives bewilder the structuring logic of colonial paradigms, such as modernity, eurocentrism, or empiricism, while they also co-opt the literary genres by mixing fiction with historiography and autobiography. By combining languages and dialects, they obscure the limits of the written and the spoken text, while testing the borders of English language. I suggest that this kind of emphasis on mixtures and crossovers is an ethical deed in a contemporary multicultural reality.

In addition to colonial history, Cliff's textual rebellion frontstages the connections between gendered norms and the imperialist ideologies. Her novels represent gender and sexual identities as experienced and processed through race and ethnicity, while the very experiences of identity are situated within an imperial landscape. Therefore, I argue that Cliff's narratives are always envisioning the intersectional past in a way which simultaneously enables both queered voices and the postcolonial emancipation to become visible. On the one hand, Cliff's textual rebellion reveals, or renders visible, the co-constituting nature of colonial modernity, nationality, stereotypical representations of gendered race, class and (hetero)normative sexu-



ality. However, on the other hand, she re-creates queer and feminist histories allowing the intersecting forms of identity to be processed. Consequently, I claimed, that the process of re-thinking identities in Cliff's novels presumes the process of re-thinking history in a way that can enable it to provide grounds for rebellious and queered agencies.

During my Caribbean journeys, I have asked many questions, and I hope that I have also provided some answers. The ulterior motive for this work has been the feeling that Cliff's works have been read too narrowly, and been considered too marginal. I have sought to put her novels into dialogue with the methodological frames posed by postcolonial studies, queer studies, cultural studies, and intersectionality. I hope to have demonstrated that all of these methods enable readers to make relevant interpretations. Cliff's novels do not only allow, they also presume, manifold research tools. I accepted the methodological challenge by trying to contextualize her novels in several ways, and to illustrate, how her narratives negotiate between multiple traditions of minority literatures. Cliff's novels 'unfur!' differently, whether they are considered in the African American, Caribbean, queer, lesbian, black feminist, postcolonial, or transnational migrant literary contexts. Therefore, they also displace the clearly shaped canon formations of literary studies addressing the negotiations between minority literatures and literary traditions – they have the potential to comment the problems of literary genres themselves, whether it is the Westernness of queer literature or the straightness of the Creole literature. I consider these negotiations as the beginning of an ethical dialogue.

To sum up my conclusions, the identity processes in Cliff's novels are three-fold: First, they are temporal. As I have stated above, identity processes always take place in relation to history. The horizon of temporality is particularly foregrounded in *Abeng*. The simultaneous existence of the different kinds of histories is highlighted in the novel. Separate histories about Inez, Nanny, Mma Alli, the Maroons, or Judge Savage, Columbus, and the Queen frame the beginning of Clare's identity-journey. She must discover and combine the lost time and the lost memories with the colonial ones. This is also why the process of identity seems to be more essentialist in places in *Abeng*. As far as the sexual identities are concerned, as I have noted earlier, *Abeng*, as Cliff's earliest novel, unsurprisingly considers identities in more binary ways than the rest.

Second, identity processes are always culturally situated and dependent on the cultural connectedness: there seems to be no greater tragedy than being displaced and de-rooted in her novels. Characters with displaced identities are left wandering aimlessly, like the murdering Christopher and Vietnam-veteran Bobby in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Thus, Clare learns the importance of place in *No Telephone to Heaven*. The meaning of place becomes her ultimate challenge in London, and the narrator tells that "She was praised for the way she analyzed Aristotle's definition of place in the *Physics*. Each thing exists in place. Each thing is described by place" (NTH, 117). The place remains theoretical in Europe, it must be experienced in Jamaica. Moreover, of Cliff's novels, *No Telephone to Heaven* is the most constructivist in its depictions of identity processes. Characters like Harry/Harriet, render visible, or rather readable, its discursive

sive claim of identities. Third, the identities in Cliff's novels are intersectional and hybrid. Identities have neither a core nor completeness, but the shifting instances of "vectors" or "facets", which all must be recognized and balanced. In *Free Enterprise*, for example, Clover Hooper commits suicide when she cannot express her queerness. *Free Enterprise* emphasizes the intersectional and transnational assemblages of identity processes in its vast collage of stories and characters more than any of Cliff's other works.

Finally, Cliff's insistence on "a complete Caribbean woman" must, therefore, be read metaphorically. The completeness emerges in her novels as a palimpsest revealing new stories and narrative layers, time and again. The completeness can be understood as the processual coexistence of differences within the self, rather than defining the crux of the self. The self, in Cliff's novels, seems to be outlined socially and contextually: subjective identities avoid both coherencies and unidimensionalities dissolving 'either-or' definitions. Identities emerge as hybrid, queered and creolized. Cliff's characters do not remain in one place, they are able to slide from one position to another illustrating the processual nature of cultural identities. Poststructurally speaking, they become signifiers, which signify differently in each context by blurring fixed meanings. While Clare is both clare and savage, and Harry becomes Harriet, Kitty, too, is also both Freeman and Savage, Regina turns into Annie, while Christopher becomes De Watchman. Clare, however, is able to recognize the different facets of her identity, as the narrator sums up in *No Telephone to Heaven*: "She is white. Black. Female. Lover. Beloved. Daughter. Traveler. Friend. Scholar. Terrorist. Farmer" (NTH, 91). Even at home, she is in all of those positions. The journey never ends. History, identity and ethics emerge intertwined in Cliff's novels: the seeking of the temporal, female self is always negotiated anew and in relation to others.



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